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C O U S I N S T E L L A :

OR,

C O N F L I C T .

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIOLET BANK AND ITS INMATES."

" I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman, too !
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty ;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet ;
A creature, not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food ;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.
And now I see with eyes serene
The very pulse of the machine ;
A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller betwixt life and death :
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill ;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warm, to comfort, and command ;
And yet a spirit still and bright,
With something of an angel light."

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	Page
XXXV. THE TAIL OF A HURRICANE . . .	1
XXXVI. THERE MUST BE A CHANGE . . .	14
XXXVII. SHADOWS THROWN BEFORE . . .	38
XXXVIII. UNDER A SPELL . . .	59
XXXIX. ON THE BRINK OF A PRECIPICE . . .	71
XL. OVER THE EDGE . . .	92
XLI. COME AT LAST . . .	112
XLII. THE DANCER'S STORY . . .	134
XLIII. TIME WANES . . .	159
XLIV. THE TWENTY-SECOND OF DECEMBER . . .	171
XLV. A DOUBLE SHOT . . .	190
XLVI. CONFLICT . . .	205
XLVII. CONFLICT . . .	230
XLVIII. TREATY, OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE . . .	261
XLIX. FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE . . .	277
CONCLUSION . . .	297

C O U S I N S T E L L A .

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TAIL OF A HURRICANE.

MISS PORTIA was in her sedan-chair, but it was all carefully closed. The old lady's face looked pitifully out at Louis and his companions. Mr. Gautier called to her to ask what was the matter, and placed his hand on one of the windows, as if to shove the glass aside.

"Let it alone, Louis Gautier," bawled Aunt Portia, "let it alone: if you open it, I shall blow you all up, and the roof off the house."

"God bless me, Aunt Portia! what has made you grow so inflammable?"

"I am full of ether, I tell you. Just as I sent to you, I felt it come on, and I bade Diana shut me up."

"Come, come, Aunt Portia," said Louis; "this is just one of your attacks of the blues; let me take you out of the chair, and you will be quite well."

"Can't walk, my good boy: my leg died yesterday. I sent for Dr. M'Niel, and told him to cut it off, but the fool laughed and went away. I tell you, Louis Gautier, that it will be dreadful by and by."

"I am sorry to hear such bad news," returned Louis; "but how did such a misfortune happen to your leg?"

"How can I tell? Who can describe how they die, or any part of them dies?"

"I do not hear you very well," called Louis; adding in a very loud voice, "How do you say it happened?"

"I don't know," shouted Aunt Portia.

Louis shook his head, as if he could not hear, glancing round at Olympia and Stella with a face over which there rippled such merriment as startled Stella, from its contrast to his usual melancholy. She seemed suddenly to be able to take the measure of what years of disappointment had done to him.

In Aunt Portia's eagerness to make herself heard, she let down a little bit of one of the windows, shouting, "I tell you again, I don't know."

Louis laid his hand on the top of the glass, forcing it open while he spoke. "Allow us to carry your chair into the yard; the rain that is falling pretty briskly will neutralize your ether." So said, so done.

By a curious coincidence, no sooner was the top of the sedan thrown open, than a flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous clap of thunder, produced a general consternation.

The fat Diana, Mercury, and Ulysses, fled,

believing their mistress had blown up, and not the least terrified was Aunt Portia herself, who lay in a heap at the bottom of her sedan-chair. Louis, though almost useless from laughter, lifted up the old lady, and carried her back into the house, setting her upright on her feet. The shock had made her forget all about her leg.

“There Aunt Portia, your blue devils have ridden off magnificently on a thunderbolt,” said Louis; “now make these ladies welcome, who must remain your guests, I perceive, for this night.”

Aunt Portia was very courteous in her way, but she retained a crestfallen look the whole of that evening.

For a time there was nothing for it but to watch the hurricane. The servants, who had run away in alarm, could not return to the house, for the wind was tearing along between heaven and earth, and whatever it met, it whirled up, tossed down, rolled over, and sent flying, to be again taken up, tossed down, and rolled

over. Stella had never witnessed such a struggle in nature. While close at hand, it was so breathless that a feather would not have waved; while yet no sound met her ear, she could trace the terrific approach of the blast, by seeing large trees falling without a struggle, like wheat under the reaper's sickle.

The little square house rocked like a ship at sea, and crash after crash announced the fall of two of the gilded turrets, Miss Portia's special pride. Louis stood between Olympia and Stella, holding a hand of each.

"Do you think we are safe in this nutshell?" whispered Olympia.

"If it be only the whisk of the tail of a hurricane, and not the beginning of one," he answered.

"You are frightened," he continued. "Do not look out of the window any more;" and he drew Olympia away from where they had been all three standing. "He never remembered me," thought Stella.

At the same moment, a scream from Miss Portia rang the knell of her sedan-chair. Forgotten in the yard, when Louis had lifted out the poor lady, it was knocked and shattered to bits by the storm; piece after piece of its old body careered in mid air, and even while Miss Lowe was yet screaming, a fragment in its mad course came bang through the window where Stella was still standing. It hit her on the wrist, and for a little while she supposed her arm was broken, but she set her teeth, and not a sound did she utter; she did not wish to force Louis to pity her, and he had no time to ask questions, for it was necessary to barricade the aperture the wood had made in its passage into the room.

The sacrifice of the venerable sedan-chair had appeased the wrath of the wind gods: the clouds opened, and the rain descended, as it probably fell on the first day of the Deluge. Danger was over, and the fat blacks issued from their hiding-

places in full chase after plates and knives and forks, swimming along in the runnels cut by the torrents pouring from the angry heavens.

“Oh! those careless devils of blacks,” shrieked Miss Portia. “I’ll tell you what,” rushing into the rain, and brandishing her stick. “I’ll have an overseer, and a whip. No, I’ll have a cat-o’-nine-tails; see if I don’t, you grinning monkeys.”

Certainly poor Aunt Portia’s reign was not one of terror, but it was one of frightful disorder. Her negroes, so *she* asserted, would one and all go through fire and water for her, but never think it worth their while, to give her either her breakfast or dinner twice at the same hour. On this day of events and disasters, any meal at all was scarcely to be expected; and Louis, knowing the habits of the house, prepared to take his leave, for nothing but the impossibility of his horse swimming the river, he said, should prevent his returning to Silver Hill to tranquillize the

Maman. He would listen to none of Olympia's arguments to the contrary.

"I should despise myself," he exclaimed, "if I ever willingly neglected my dear mother's comfort: it shall not be for a little more or less water, at any rate."

Stella looked at him with surprise: was he then unconscious that he made Mrs. Gautier often believe that she was no longer of any consequence to him? Stella's heart was glad within her at this proof of Louis's love for the Maman: her eye brightened, and no word to detain him came from her lips. She would rather have him *sans peur et sans reproche*, and break her heart over his danger, than have him safe at her feet, with a duty neglected.

Louis saw her wish in her eager eyes, and he went, but half pleased though. He did not examine his thoughts, but Stella rather lost with him for the time being. "She has too little of the softness of a woman: she ought to have

lived in the days of knight-errantry, when ladies were won by peril of body." Thus he mused as he swam his good steed Kaled through the swollen river.

And all that evening how painfully alive Stella's senses were to every gust of wind and splash of rain; how her temples throbbed while Miss Portia kept her a prisoner at backgammon. Aunt Portia's passion was backgammon. All struggle with the world over, (probably Miss Lowe had had her romance as well as other people,) in her long solitude, she had attached herself to puerilities and dreams.

Stella was fairly bewildered by the fire of her adversary's technical eloquence. "Quatre ace! what a pace, for a woman in a hurry! Cinque and tré!—haste away! Tréduce!—traduce me not!" on and on, over and over again, until bed-time.

Released from this durance, it was to lie awake and listen to the ominous roaring of Bull Bay,

and when sleep overtook her, as it will do the young, it was to dream that Louis was calling to her for help. Surely it is his voice that wakes her! Yes, it is morning again, and he is speaking through the window to Olympia, who is in the next room to Stella. Thank God! he is safe.

When they all met at breakfast, Olympia was in the highest spirits; so entirely engrossing the conversation that it was impossible for any one else to put in a word. She took on herself to answer every one of Louis's questions and remarks.

"You should have seen Miss Lowe and Stella last evening, Gautier; such a pair of gamblers! I don't think they would have heard another hurricane. I could scarcely hear the noise of the river for their talking and laughing;" and Olympia looked so artless and lovely—how could any man imagine that she was calculating on the effect of her every word?

Aunt Portia fell into thought, while Olympia went on giving her own version of the evening before. Presently Miss Lowe exclaimed—

“I have been thinking over what you have just said, Madam Olympia, and, do you know, I am not at all of your opinion?” There was a silence. “Miss Stella neither laughed nor talked. I am a selfish old thing, and took advantage of her good-nature. I’d be sorry Louis Gautier should believe that the young lady was unfeeling through my bad tricks. It wouldn’t have been pretty in her, not to care whether her cousin was safe or not.”

Stella loved Aunt Portia from that moment, and thought her, in spite of her visions and blue devils, a clever old woman; and, indeed, Aunt Portia was by no means a fool. She drew Mr. Gautier aside, as she said, to consult him about another sedan chair, and then she observed to him—

“That young cousin of thine, friend Louis,

is neither well nor happy. *L'ame use* — what's it your horrid French says—wears out the body? To be sure, something must, you know; suppose you find out what?"

The road to Silver Hill was much cut up; the river considerably wider and fuller than the day before; and Stella's bruised arm was so stiff as to make the holding of the bridle really a difficulty to her.

Louis had frequently to bid her keep a tighter rein; once he spoke quite sharply, for Janet had made a dangerous stumble.

"That beast is unsafe," he said: "you shall not ride it again."

This tone of authority over her, gladdened Stella's heart. He was not, then, totally indifferent to her.

"Raise your hand," continued Louis, and he took hold of her wrist to show her his meaning. Involuntarily she winced. "Did I hurt you?" he asked, surprised.

“The piece of sedan chair hit me yesterday, cousin Louis.”

He pushed up the sleeve of the habit, and saw the discolouration.

“Why did you not tell us that you had been hurt?”

“You were too much occupied to have time to think of me, cousin Louis;” and Stella rode forward.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERE MUST BE A CHANGE.

ONE of the incidents that broke the routine of Silver Hill, was the arrival of English letters. Celia had never ceased urging Stella to return to England. By the mail with which we have to do, she wrote not only to Stella, but to Mr. Gautier on this subject. Louis's brow wore an angry red spot, as he perused the effusion addressed to him by his first love: probably Celia told him he was acting from selfish motives in detaining Stella, and added many other agreeable remarks; certainly Celia would not spare Louis Gautier.

To Stella, pretty Auntie wrote in the most

fondling terms her vocabulary afforded ; yet there were little stings in the tail of some of the light phrases. There was also a bit of news. "Your old admirer, S. S., is returned from a tour round Europe, looking handsomer than ever, as if he had left off wearing some years of his life. Harriette declares he has been in search of some lost love, and has discovered her happy decease ; for he is less mysterious, and talks in favour of marriage. At one time I thought he meant to be Hattie's son-in-law, but I believe he is faithful to you, Stella—more particularly so, since you have become an heiress."

Celia did not take any trouble to compose her sentences ; the letter went on thus :—

"I put you on your guard : forewarned, forearmed. Major Dashwood heard from Mr. Hood that the old beau is moving, not heaven, but the West End—that is, some old first-class cronies—to get him sent to any of the colonies as slave protector, one of the new-fangled appointments

created by the anti-slavery party. I suspect our friend of meaning to have two strings to his bow—of speculating in emancipation and in heiresses. He has an eye on Jamaica, though he is too sly to allude to such a possibility before us. Now you know the proverb, ‘In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed is king.’ You will think our dear S. S. an Adonis when compared with such as unfortunately you are condemned alone to see in your wilderness. But you are *not* to marry Mr. Smythe: he is very well to flirt with, but he is too old, too poor, too—what shall I call it?—too good-for-nothing for *you*, or any like you.” Then followed the usual admonitions about Stella’s stay in Jamaica, the usual adjurations and solicitations.

Stella uttered an exclamation of surprise when she came to the paragraph relating to the probability of Mr. Smythe’s coming to Jamaica. Louis and Olympia (it was in the evening when they were all assembled in the sitting-room) looked

at Stella inquiringly. With a deep blush, that of course Louis misconstrued, she said—

“Who do you think is likely to come to Jamaica, cousin Louis? Precisely, your old antipathy, Mr. Stapylton Smythe!”

“Indeed! and does your correspondent mention the why and the wherefore of his coming?”

“Auntie says, he is trying to get some new appointment that is going to be established in Jamaica and the other islands. This is what Auntie writes——” Then remembering Celia’s remarks and warnings, she blushed again and hesitated.

Louis said no more, but his face wore its darkest shade. A few minutes after, Stella laid her aunt’s letter open before him. He wished to say, “No, I thank you,” but curiosity, perhaps jealousy, conquered his pride, and he perused Celia’s epistle from one end to the other. Olympia meanwhile had returned to her book, showing no further interest.

To hide her embarrassment while Louis was

reading Auntie's suppositions and advice, Stella went to the piano.

"Sing, Stella my dear," said the Maman. "I do not like that noisy dance music."

"What shall it be, Maman?" asked Stella.

"Any one of your little songs."

Though far from rivalling that of Olympia, in power or flexibility, Stella's voice was not to be despised: it belonged to that class the Italians define as "*voce simpatica*."

Association of ideas brought to Stella's mind Mr. Smythe's Romaic song; she began it with the Romaic words, stopped, and said, "I must sing it in Italian." Her voice shook with emotion at the idea of singing before Louis.

"Nei giorni tuoi felici, ricordati di me,
Se a me fedel tu sei, fedel a te sarò."

She went through it, and when she had sung the last note, it seemed to her she had never known so dead a silence. She turned round; surely it was her fancy: Olympia's eyes

were fixed on her with an expression of hatred and horror quite alarming. Stella went to the Maman's side, but she could not help watching Olympia. She saw that though sitting so immovable, her hands, which hung down from the arms of the chair, were trembling; never did tongue express more intense agitation than those silent, quivering fingers.

In a little, Olympia passed a hand over her eyes, exclaimed that the room was overpoweringly hot, and walked into the piazza. In every-day society, men and women put a muzzle on their feelings. They do not faint, they do not threaten with loud bullying words: they love, they hate, they are murderers in thought, they offer themselves up as sacrifices; but the drama is played out in their hearts in silence, and the wicked, as well as the divine impulse, is known only to God.

✓Of all persons who hold an habitual guard over themselves, none do so more stringently

than those who have disagreeable antecedents. Some experienced person has likened a cautious manner, a sedulous emission of great sentiments, an unusual dose of prudery, to conspirators' passports, in which no irregularities are to be found.

Whatever the cause of Olympia's menacing look at Stella, she gave it no utterance. She remained in the piazza to meditate, but she could put no order in her thoughts for one besieging desire. If it were only possible to get rid of Stella; if she could be induced to leave Silver Hill at once. Various designs ran riot in the troubled woman's brains; it was well that they went no further than conception. Of every criminal of whom we hear, let us go down on our knees, and thank God, not as the Pharisee, but in the spirit of the publican, let us thank God humbly, that by His grace we have been saved from committing a crime: tempted in likewise, we had perhaps in likewise

fallen. We see and testify to the evil done; we know nothing of the evil resisted. Let us turn our glance inwards each time we would cast the stone, and we shall lay it aside for prayer and thanksgiving.

Louis had not seen Olympia's repressed emotion: he had not looked off the letter in his hand. Stella could not have told whether Mrs. Gautier had or had not noticed Olympia at that instant, for her eyes were closed when Stella took refuge by her side.

"I agree with Mrs. Dashwood in some of her remarks," said Louis, giving back the letter to Stella.

"In which, cousin Louis?"

"She is right in saying you are too much cut off from the society of your equals."

"Do you mean that as a compliment or not, cousin Louis?"

"I mean it," he returned, "exactly as your Aunt Dashwood means it; that living here at Silver

Hill, you are debarred from forming those intimacies which might lead to your being happily married."

"Have I ever given you any cause to suppose that I was wishing to be married?" flashed out Stella, with considerable hauteur.

Stella was in the low chair by Mrs. Gautier's side.

The Maman laid her hand on the girl's head, saying, "She is but twenty yet, Louis. So there's time enough: do not take her from me yet."

"God forbid that I should put any constraint on her feelings," replied Louis, his serious eyes fixed on Stella, but she kept her face hid on the Maman's knee. He approached her. "You must not be angry with me, Stella," he said, "for playing the part of a sober guardian. What I say, I say for conscience sake; and you ought to make some account of my bearing the insinuations of selfishness which are made

against me, for having yielded to your wish of remaining in Jamaica. Come, give me your hand as a sign of peace."

She held it out to him; and as he clasped it firmly, he was astonished to feel it so cold and clammy.

During this little scene, Olympia was looking in at the door. Rather embarrassed by his own position, standing before a young lady who would not look at him, Louis joined Olympia, and together they went into the piazza. Stella raised her head, listened to their retreating steps, then looking at Mrs. Gautier, broke forth with, "Oh, Maman! I love you, how I love you; as long as I have you, I shall never be quite miserable. Keep me with you. Don't let any one send me away."

"Send you away!" said the Maman. "Why should we desire to part with our rosebud?"

Decidedly the Maman had not seen Olympia's glaring eyes.

Olympia led Louis from the piazza to the terrace before the house. Stars spangled the dark blue of heaven; fireflies spangled the dark earth; but neither gentle light let Louis see the dire paleness of his companion. They walked side by side for some time without speaking; then Olympia broke the thread of Mr. Gautier's thoughts by asking him point-blank what had been in Mrs. Dashwood's letter.

He told her very exactly.

"What a change a girl brings into a house," observed Olympia.

"Yes, she brings a whole unread poem with her," answered Louis.

"A poem eternally the same," said Olympia. "Ignorance and its bliss at the beginning; then the passions and pomps and vanity of the world; a handsome or an ugly hero, for all depends on opportunity—a girl must fall in love, and it will be with the first comer; short-lived smiles and hopes; Psyche takes the lamp, discovers

Cupid to be a monster or an idiot—threats, quarrels, duplicities, and the poem ends.”

Bitter as the words were, the tone in which they were uttered made them still more so. Louis could not help being startled, and said—

“You are very severe, Olympia, on girls, and too much so, certainly, on Stella.”

“It might seem so to people in general, but I did not expect you to think so. I speak from sad experience. I look on a girl with pity rather than severity; and if Stella were my daughter, I would myself choose a husband for her, a practical professional man—one for whom she might have a friendly feeling, but not love. I should insist on such a marriage. The husband and wife would be little together, so would not be tempted to hate one another. She would have her children to occupy her time and heart; and would go through life tranquilly and safely—without great joy perhaps, but without suffering.”

After a short silence Louis said, “You speak

at your ease, my dear friend, but have you a right to require a young creature to accept of your choice, and resign her birthright of love for a mess of pottage of content? You yourself, how would you have agreed to such a fate at twenty years of age?"

"It is because I was so mad myself, so headstrong, that I would preserve my sister's daughter. Our blood runs too swiftly in our veins; we need modifying by more lethargic natures: send Stella back to her English friends, and you will save her."

"I cannot propose her going. I have done so more than once, and I have promised not to moot the question again."

"Then," said Olympia with violence, "it is all over with our comfort: it was a cruel fate that brought her here."

Louis did not allow himself to answer immediately: he took a turn up the terrace first, then on his way back said, in a dry staccato voice,

"Yes, it has been a fate. It is true that 'there is a divinity shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.' Oh! my dear friend"—An avowal trembled on his lips: a word, one friendly word from Olympia, and he would have made her his confidant. He waited for this sympathising word, and instead heard constrained weeping. He felt cruelly disappointed and irritated, and said, vehemently, "But what would you have me do? I cannot turn the girl out of the house."

"No," returned Olympia, "but I can go. I never deceived myself; I knew a day would come when I should have to leave Silver Hill. I must seek a lasting refuge in some convent in Cuba."

"Upon my word," said Louis, "you astonish me. I cannot discover any sufficient reason for such a rash resolution. What is there to-day that was not yesterday? In what have I or any of us sinned? Is it impossible for you to exist in the same house with your niece?"

"Yes, it is."

There was no mistaking the feeling that prompted this decision: the truth burst upon Mr. Gautier at once. Had a blaze of the electric fluid from the heaven above suddenly enveloped him from head to foot, Louis could not have experienced a greater commotion than these three words produced on him. Even his faculty of speaking was suspended. Olympia waited awhile as if she expected an answer; then said, in her usual gentle way,—

“Do not let us speak any more on the subject just now. I cannot help a sort of nervous dread of changes. I have suffered so much, that the only happiness I can understand is an unvarying routine—one day the type of the next. I did not mean to speak unkindly of Stella, or to vex you, Louis.” It was very seldom that Olympia called him by his Christian name: it sounded almost as strange to him, in its softness, as her unusual violence had done. It piques a woman horribly, when she has given way to any little

sentimentality, to have it left on her hands. Olympia added in a sharper tone, "We must accept our friends with their faults," slipped her arm from his, and went quickly into the house.

In the solitude of the night, Louis Gautier examined his present situation—that situation which Olympia's few words had laid bare to him. He must and would extricate himself from the false position into which his imprudence, or rather want of foresight, had placed him. But how? Probably had Mr. Gautier been a man of business in England, or a soldier, or a sailor—in short, in any calling of life where a man's mind rubs against other men's minds, and thus is kept bright and clear, he might not have been so perplexed as he was on the present occasion. Everybody has had the experience of how different our judgments are of the same thing in different atmospheres, or even in a room out of doors. Many a morbid cobweb has been swept

from a brain by a brisk breeze and a sunshiny day.

Louis Gautier had none of these healthy helps to a clear comprehension of his difficulty: he was in an enervating climate, and pretty nearly "monarch of all he surveyed." He did as we are all apt to do: began his consideration of the present, by recalling the past—reëcriminating the past. He perceived that in the first numbness of disappointment he had strayed into a labyrinth, out of which he now was aware it would not be easy to find his way, without wounding himself and others to death. This is just the worst part of false positions: few are good enough generals always to avoid a blunder, and then follows either a murderous retreat or an ignominious surrender.

The more Louis thought of it, the less clearly he could define his position; and, worse and worse, the less courage he had to face it. "There must be a change—we cannot continue

thus," he repeated over and over again, with a consciousness that it was a case for cutting his way out with a sword, and a perfect consciousness also that he shrunk from the only remedy.

It is a rare and an inexpressible blessing to be able to walk straight to an end, if it be to the cannon's mouth, without looking to the right or the left—to be able to measure accurately where duty ceases, and *sensiblerie* begins. Louis had plenty of head and nerve, but he had too much sensitiveness—a fault of temperament unconquered, perhaps unconquerable. He evaded the decision that would have been most merciful to every one concerned: he temporised as most of us do when in a difficulty of some delicate nature.

He had a real affection for Olympia: had she been a single woman, very likely, in spite of the difference of age, it might have taken a different turn from that which it had done.

He had long believed that this friendship was sufficient for him: he called it love without passion. They had both been very enthusiastic at first—had promised to each other never to have or withhold any secret, never to separate. And now, behold, even at this friend's side, without the aid of absence, a young un-formed girl had plunged Louis into all his old dreams—had poised his spirit again on the wings of hope.

“Are friendship and love impossible under the same roof?” asked Louis, with the same despair probably with which many other Louises have inquired. Did he not now confess that it would be something as difficult to find as the four-leaved shamrock?

It must be allowed that the first resolution which presented itself to Gautier was flight; but he very soon recognised that as impossible. One point alone he was certain of: let what would be the consequence to himself, Olympia should

not be sent out, to brave the hard-judging world. Could he endow her with the fortune of Cræsus, he should despise himself if he harboured the idea, it could make amends to her for the loss of home and friend.

He thus reduced himself to one possibility, if change there must be. Stella, the young, beautiful heiress should go. He would base his plea on reasons drawn from Mrs. Dashwood's letter: she must never suspect the true cause. Louis could see what a terrible award threatened him and Olympia—should Stella penetrate his motives he could never hope to clear either the one or the other in his cousin's opinion. How could he say, "I am not my own master," and ask her to believe that the chain binding him was not a vicious one. Did he acknowledge to himself that Stella's happiness might be in jeopardy? Not yet. He thanked God very fervently, as many Louises have done before him, that he had never said one word that could lead her to guess his

feelings towards her; he was, reluctantly, but decidedly, trying to cheat himself. Conscience here gave him so smart a prick, that he pleaded, "Yes, I know her ingenuous trust in me might easily be raised to love, but I *have* preserved her against myself. I will do so: every feeling of honour obliges me to do so."

Human nature is full of the strangest contradictions, and not the least puzzling among them are the prejudices and scruples as to "points of honour." Sources alike of the noblest actions, and of the most egregious mistakes and follies, how many martyrs can they not boast! What oceans of tears! what unknown Calvarys.

Louis Gautier was four-and-thirty, and not twenty-four. So he did not rave, or call on the high heavens to compassionate him, but he passed a sleepless night, thinking sadly, what rash bills of exchange youth draws on the future.

Not the less decided, however, was he in his resolutions when he arose in the morning: he was even in a hurry to assure Olympia, that he held good the promise given, and that not only to the letter, but in the spirit. In pursuance of this decision, he said to her, "You must help me in the present circumstances, as you have done in many others during these last ten years—years never to be forgotten by me. Your peace, and that of our common home, are sacred to your grateful friend."

Louis's tone was calm and firm; he had intended it to be kind. Olympia was impressed, and asked, almost submissively, "What do you wish me to do?"

"Merely to have patience with Stella's presence at Silver Hill for a few months longer, till she is of age. Perhaps before that, she may wish to go to England; and if not, I shall find some respectable lady to act as her chaperone at Cedar Valley. We shall then resume our former

existence here, and forget there has been any interruption."

Olympia listened in silence and inward dismay. "Was it possible that the unguarded word which had betrayed her real feelings had hardened instead of softened him. Probably; coming as it did in the shape of a barrier between him and his happiness. It is false to imagine that the discovery of a woman's love for a man must of necessity touch, must invariably flatter him. *C'est selon*, as a Frenchman would say.

A strong-minded, good man submits where duty and justice require it of him, or where he fancies they do: but claims in cases of the affections are sad mistakes, resulting in making every one concerned *too often* miserable, and most certainly *always* uncomfortable and disagreeable. Gautier felt towards Olympia in this emergency much as that knight of old did to the lady who required him to fetch her glove from the lion's

den. His idea of knightly honour did not permit him to refuse to give this proof of devotion, but the fair dame lost her devoted servant. For self-sacrifice, to be a manifestation of love, must be voluntary, not coerced.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SHADOWS THROWN BEFORE.

THE peace and contentment within the walls of Silver Hill had run its allotted time ; nowhere on earth can perfection and permanence be hoped for. Passions, great or small, are the sure destroyers of even the most rational circle of friends.

Nevertheless it was impossible to be more graciously kind to Stella, more gently cheerful with every one, than was Olympia. Perhaps, with her clear head, she discerned the signs, fore-runners of an inevitable change ; perhaps she regretted having made the first breach ; at all events, she was evidently desirous of putting off the evil day. Far more than by her passion was Mr. Gautier touched by the efforts she made to be agreeable to Stella ; and he wondered at, and

disapproved of the young lady's passiveness under all Olympia's attentions. One day he even remarked to the latter—

“I will not have you so observant of Stella; I do not like to see you so submissive: there is something unnatural in it. Your two natures do not assimilate: it is a misfortune which we must bear with dignity, as we do other irreparable misfortunes.”

At that time it dawned upon Stella that in the same capricious manner Louis but a short while since was always coming and going, so now his absences were strangely prolonged. He looked ill, haggard, like a man who passed his nights without sleep and his days in anxiety. At first Stella feared that his affairs were going wrong; she knew he had had great difficulty in keeping himself free of debt. But this could not be the case, for Olympia was in her usual spirits, though she was more in the counting-house than she had ever been since Stella came

to Silver Hill. A suspicion grew very soon into certainty, that her cousin wished to avoid her. Stella was angry once more, then vexed, though she did her best to maintain her equable manner. The cousins studied one another very closely; for Louis's face often twitched after one of Stella's polite speeches, in which no other ear but his would have perceived any dryness, and Stella saw the look of pain she dreaded become fixed on his features.

Other sources of disquiet, besides domestic ones, were at hand. Rumours reached even the recluses of Silver Hill, of a growing licence among the blacks in the towns. One of the stories of the day was, that a list had been discovered in which certain ladies' names figured, as the intended brides of the ringleaders of a *soi-disant* conspiracy. It was also said that young ladies had been addressed by negroes in terms which made their escort, military men, use their riding-whips.

Such matters were, unfortunately, too often discussed at dinner-tables, with the utmost plainness, before half-a-dozen strapping blacks, as if they had been only "the goods and chattels" the law held them to be. The management of properties daily became more difficult; and to meet the exigencies of the moment, planters and overseers banded themselves together, and enacted private laws of great rigour for their own guidance. Certain that this was no time for increase of severity, certain that the moment of emancipation was at hand, and that the only hope of safety lay in allowing it to arrive without a shock, Louis refused to take any share in the regulations of the self-elected legislators. He was consequently looked upon by some as a renegade to the general weal—as a favourer of missionaries; by others, as a man likely to fall between two stools.

Stella gloried in his resistance to the tyranny of the majority, and could not prevent symptoms of her satisfaction reaching Mr. Gautier; and a



very flushed cheek and brightened eye he wore that day.

It would not be easy for an every-day pen, like the one writing these words, to do justice to the immense amount of evil occasioned by popular ignorance. The conduct of the Jamaica people at this period was just what the conduct of all despotisms becomes. Certain consequences inevitably follow certain acts. Thus, in the moment ripe for its downfall, we may, with undoubting faith, look for extraordinary blind credulity, a reckless obedience to the impulse of self-interest, which no experience, no bygone facts, has ever been known to affect.

Christmas was at hand again—another year had been added to the age of the universe.

Was the planet we call the world any nearer the realization of good-will to men and to peace on earth? Let us see. The old nations of Europe were vibrating under the struggle for liberty. Merry England was not merry at all,

with the Reform Bill and the Corn Laws to settle.

France, the initiator, had once again unfurled her tricoloured banner of liberty, equality, fraternity. Italy had shaken herself in her lair, and the rattle of her chains had sent a quake from head to foot of every one on whose head weighed a crown. The reverberation of the emotions of Europe ran the round of the globe. Gold and blood were plentifully spent, a fierce cloud gathered, and hung heavy and threatening over the West Indies; when it burst, would it purify, or utterly destroy? Some, regarding it with terror, fled; some shook their fists at it in menace; others raised a cry of derision. What! the inferior race subdue the superior!—the hare conquer the lion! Some there were who never looked at aught but the gay parterres among which they walked, like the child playing with the flowers concealing the precipice.



One morning in early December, as Stella was standing on the terrace looking out at the beautiful sight of the coffee plantation, contrasting it in thought with the snowy scenes of England in that month, she heard the sound of many voices, and saw something glittering appear and disappear on the zigzag road leading up the hill to the house. There was no doubt what that cackling sound portended: it was the flourish of music that announced the arrival of Aunt Portia; and in a minute or two a brand new sedan, painted in blue, white, and red, and with gilded cornices, appeared rocking along the terrace.

Aunt Portia's political bias may be guessed from the colours she sported. She was a little late in this open display of her partisanship, but it had been a mere question of time: her sympathies were peculiarly marked when she had the power of showing them. Aunt Portia, had she lived till now, would have painted her sedan

red, and nothing but red. Though seventy, dear old lady, she had the greatest faith in the perfectibility of human beings. Every revolution, upon whatever account, was acceptable to her as a sign of progress. Many a quarrel had she had on politics with her favourite, Louis Gautier ; and it could only have been her horror of the sight of blood, which had prevented her being the Joan of Arc of the blacks. Aunt Portia was a republican, communist, socialist, to the backbone ; and, what was really strange, she lived up to her principles.

The sedan was set down in the piazza, and the lady within it scarcely noticed Stella's greeting, so eager was she to know where Mr. Gautier was ; she must see him directly.

" I have nothing to say to you, good people : " this to the three ladies now assembled round the sedan : " I must have a man's opinion. The masculine gender has the precedence with me, and I am free to acknowledge it."



"Whatever your news, Miss Portia, I am sure it is good news," said Mrs. Gautier: "I have not seen you looking so well for years."

"Well, now, Mrs. Gautier, I'll ask your opinion as a woman of sense and experience. At what age do you think a female may escape the calumny of the world?"

"I am afraid it would be matter of offence to our sex to suppose they could escape that at *any* age," returned the Maman, with a quiet little laugh.

"Very cleverly answered," observed Aunt Portia. "Now then, at what age can a woman make sure of not feeling the *bella passion*? I make it an open question. You all laugh. Miss Stella would give Madam Olympia's, and Madam Olympia would give mine: it's all comparative. I begin to think it not impossible at any age."

"You are very enigmatical to-day, Aunt Portia," exclaimed Stella. "Do tell us what has happened, or is going to happen."

"There's a gentleman in the case," replied Aunt Portia; "and I am sorely tempted to accept his offer, my dear friends. Lately I have begun to feel the inconvenience of being a lone woman."

"Oh! my good Miss Lowe!" pronounced Mrs Gaatier, in a tone of warning.

"It's just being Miss Lowe, ma'am, makes the mischief," cried the spinster. "I can tell you, if you were here by yourself, and hearing whispers all night round your house, turn which way you would in your bed, and drag the counterpane over your head, and still whisper, whisper, whisper; if you saw great black eyes staring out of every coffee-bush, you would be very glad, I suspect, to accept a polite, handsome gentleman's offer to come and reside with you, and feel mightily inclined to say, 'Sir, hang up your hat on the first peg in the hall, and make yourself quite at home.'"

Olympia shrunk back as she heard the words, "polite, handsome gentleman."

"Who comes in such questionable guise?" asked Louis, as he came in and saw the parti-coloured sedan.

"Just the person wanted," exclaimed Aunt Portia, throwing up the top of the sedan. "Louis Gautier, were you acquainted in England with a Mr. Stapylton Smythe?"

"Yes; that is, I met a gentleman of that name at Major Dashwood's house and elsewhere."

"And what did you think of him?"

"I did not come to any particular conclusion on the subject of Mr. Smythe. What have you to do with him, Aunt Portia?"

"He is not the man to commit murder, eh?"

"Not more likely to do so than any other person of my acquaintance."

"And your opinion, Miss Stella?"

"I don't like Mr. Smythe much, Aunt Portia."

"He doesn't return the compliment; for he talks of you as if you were a heathen goddess."

“Once more, Aunt Portia, where have you seen Mr. Smythe?” asked Mr. Gautier.

“At my own house, my dear lad; you see, Mr. Boyick brought him to me: he is sent out by H.M. as a slave protector.”

“Oh! indeed—that is something quite new.”

“Quite!” replies Miss Portia. “And besides that, my beau is come to make a revolution among us, he’ll be a general benefactor, Mr. Louis. He has got the charge of Valmarosa Estate as planting attorney, and he is going to plant vines there; and we shall soon be done with all your rubbish of coffee and sugar.”

“But why are you so interested about his character?”

“Ah! that’s the very thing brought me here. You know the great house at Valmarosa is in a pretty pickle—scarcely two shingles on the roof: till it is put to rights, Boyick proposed my letting this gentleman a part of my house. Says I to them both: ‘You can go away for the present,

and I'll think it over ; ' which meant, I'll get something out of that close chap Louis Gautier about this fine gentleman : for he is a fine gentleman—courteous as an heir apparent, and handsome too, though he is not so young as he has been."

"You can get nothing out of Louis Gautier," replied Louis ; "for I do not know anything for or against Mr. Smythe."

"Well, then, I think I'll take him on trial," was Aunt Portia's summing up ; "he'll be company at dinner : it won't be more than a nine days' scandal at most. Why don't you like Mr. Smythe, Miss Stella?"

"I neither like nor dislike him, Aunt Portia."

"Young ladies don't always speak the truth. I remember I used to say certain persons were ugly, whom I thought the handsomest in the world. Call my people, Louis. I am off: my beau is to call again to-day on his way here. Miss Stella, you have a fine colour. Bye—bye,—all of you!" waving her thin bony hand ; and Aunt

Portia sunk out of sight, drawing down the top of the sedan after her.

A short while after Miss Lowe's departure, Olympia said, "Will you come out with me, Stella? There's plenty of shade in the mango grove." The two ladies walked almost in silence till they reached a sort of natural avenue. Then Olympia said, "I want you to tell me more about this new neighbour to be."

"My aunt Dashwood said, he was a very clever man; he sings very well, and he has a manner of talking to people as if he cared very much about them, while in reality he does not," was Stella's reply.

"That is to say," observed Olympia, "he admired you very much."

"I cannot tell indeed, for he used to put on the same look when he spoke to Mrs. Hood, or Auntie, or Emily Hubbard—worse with her than any one."

"Do you know, Stella, that I think that his

real motive for coming to Jamaica is to look after you."

"Then he will very soon go away again," said Stella, quietly; "but I do not believe Mr. Smythe cared for me."

"What gave you that impression, my dear?"

"Perhaps I did fancy he liked me rather at one time. Auntie and Major Dashwood had some idea of the kind, I know; but I found out he did not, for Mrs. Hubbard asked him one day before me why he did not marry and have some one to nurse him, for he was often ill—he had broken a blood vessel I believe: he laughed, and said, he was not a marrying man—that he would not marry for money, and that he was too poor to marry without. Besides, I am sure he did not care for me," wound up Stella with emphasis; "for he always made way for other gentlemen to come and talk to me, and was always joking me about my being married."

"But he knows now that you are rich," said

Olympia: "he has come to Jamaica with some other aim than the one he gives out, depend on it."

"He cannot force me to marry him against my will; so I am not a bit afraid of him."

Olympia, after a moment's thought, said, "I do not often intrude my opinions on you; but as your nearest relative here, perhaps it is my duty to advise you to be prudent with this gentleman—to begin as you intend to end, I mean: by showing a marked avoidance of him. He seems by your description to be a male coquet, and you may get yourself entangled before you know where you are."

Stella slightly laughed. "You had better see him first before you decree his banishment. Who knows? you may like him very much, though I do not."

"It is an odd way of showing your dislike, to encourage his visits."

"I have no wish to encourage his visits, but



at the same time, I don't intend to be rude, and I shall not object to hearing some news of my friends in England. Mr. Smythe never gave me any reason for wishing particularly to avoid him."

"You are not insensible, I see, to the pleasure of being admired: many girls—most girls, I may say—think it a feather in their cap to have had several offers; they overlook the fact that it stamps them as common flirts."

"You judge me very severely, Olympia," said Stella. "It will be time enough to call me a flirt when you have proofs to give."

"Then you are resolved to shelter yourself under a false plea of ignorance and blindness to his intentions, to attract Mr. Smythe here."

"I shall neither try to attract nor repel," said Stella, now much offended.

"You mean to make use of one man to bring another forward?" burst out Olympia.

"I do not understand you," said Stella, coldly.

"You *do* understand me, and I understand you perfectly," retorted Olympia, with a look of scorn.

"I repeat that I do not understand your insinuation," said Stella, moving away.

"You shall not go," and Olympia seized the girl's arm; "you are a very cautious young lady—*very*," she went on bitterly. "You must have dots on every 'i,' and crosses on every 't,' before you can venture to comprehend a gentleman's intentions: there's nothing on earth so false as your prudae."

"I shall be obliged if you will set my arms free," said Stella.

"No: you shall not go to complain of me to Gantier. I will give you the explanation you require. If you do not keep Mr. Smythe away, there will be blood on your head: those two men will fight; and that woman is a despicable wretch who risks men's lives to feed her vanity. Why don't you answer me, and not look as if you



thought me mad? You know as well as I do that Louis Gautier loves you!"

"Louis loves me!" exclaimed Stella, extricating her arm. "If I had ever believed so, I should disbelieve it now, hearing it from your lips. No, no. I am young and inexperienced, but not silly enough to put faith in words like those from you. What! You who, ever since I saw you, have done everything you could to separate me from Louis—who have used artifice upon artifice to make him think meanly of me—who have forced me to appear in the worst light before him—you come now and expect me to believe that it is because Louis loves me, that it is for *that* you want me to keep away Mr. Smythe? That is not the reason. I do not guess what it is, I may never know, but——"

"Have pity on me, Stella!" cried Olympia, flinging her arms round Stella. "There *is* another reason. I have told you the truth, but not the whole truth. Stella, keep that man away!

I cannot tell you why, but may I die this moment if I am deceiving you. Oh, heavens! there's Gautier's whistle. Stella, Stella, have mercy! Don't tell him what I have asked!"

"You are safe with me," said Stella. "God forgive you if this be a trick or an artifice to injure me: it will be on your head."

"I have your promise to keep what I have said secret," persisted Olympia.

Stella bowed.

"But if you wear such a face as you do now, Gautier will see that there has been some disagreement between us."

"I am not a good comedian," returned Stella, "but I am in good faith with you."

The angry retort on Olympia's lips was arrested by Louis being now within hearing. Stella could see Olympia's face clear, but she felt her own countenance had not thrown off its disturbance, by the sudden change in the expression of her cousin's eyes. Louis had reached them smiling

he had been evidently amused, and had come with the intention of imparting his amusement.

The marbled complexion of Stella's cheeks, denoting that agitation had troubled the even course of her blood, struck him instantly. Olympia watched him; his countenance lowered in sympathy with that of Stella. Instead of the lively speech he had intended to make, Louis gravely announced that Mr. Smythe was at the house, and hoped to see Miss Joddrell. Stella at once bent her steps homeward.

"I shall leave you a free tête-à-tête to-day, Stella," said Olympia. "I shall wait for another time to make the gentleman's acquaintance."

Stella walked away in silence. She never turned her head by way of inviting Louis to accompany her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNDER A SPELL.

OPPOSITION is the first impulse of mankind. Mr. Smythe, twenty-four hours before, would have been an object of indifference to Stella: she would have rather that he would have avoided Silver Hill than otherwise. Now, that he was invested with a mystery, he had become an object of curiosity and interest to her.

Mr. Smythe met Stella with an air of great pleasure—even made a little display of emotion, but quite within bounds; talked pleasantly of their mutual friends in England; told her that there were rumours of Miss Emily Hubbard's marriage to a high dignitary of the Church of England; said that Miss Philadelphia Dashwood

had made him undergo a course of missionary tracts; lamented the unsettled state of Jamaica; believed that there were exaggerations on both sides of the Atlantic—good people to be found everywhere. Could anything be more patriarchal than Miss Lowe's establishment?"

"Ah!" replied Stella, "but Aunt Portia's management of slaves is a very exceptional case."

"Still an Emancipationist, Miss Joddrell?"

"More than ever, now that I have with mine own eyes seen what slavery is."

"You are aware that I came hither in the capacity of slave protector? I meet with great opposition: indeed the people here refuse to acknowledge the existence of such an office."

"Then you will not remain here long, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, the island will be compelled to yield; and besides, I am about to try an experiment at Valmarosa, whether Jamaica may not be made available as a wine-growing country.

With vineyards instead of sugar and coffee, you might easily dispense with slave labour. May I hope for the patronage of Cedar Valley?"

"I will not make rash promises," said Stella, wishing, with all her heart, Mr. Smythe would go. They were seated in the piazza, and she remarked how at every slight noise he turned his head as if on the look-out for some one.

Olympia's entreaty had put Stella's imagination on the alert, and even while speaking, she was trying to work out some probable reason for her impassioned appeal. The conversation therefore so languished that at last the visitor rose to take his leave.

"Where is your horse?" asked Stella, with alacrity.

"I left him with a servant at the foot of the hill. The road up here is rather a trial to the nerves of an English racer. Upon my word, this residence is like a little fort. You might hold out some time against an attack,

if you had only a couple of those small brass cannon I saw at Custos Boyick's place."

"But as we have no cannon," replied Stella, "I hope we may never be attacked."

"I hope not. Nevertheless the temper of the negroes is alarming, Miss Joddrell. I shall do my best as a pacificator, you may be sure of that; at all events, remember, in any case of danger or difficulty, I am entirely at your service. I shall only be too happy to show the gratitude I feel for the Dashwoods' kindness to me."

Stella could not find a word to say.

"May I hope that your friends here will not forget that we are near neighbours? I enjoy Miss Lowe's racy society amazingly; but a little variety will be very acceptable."

"The Maman—I mean, my aunt, Mrs. Gautier, is infirm and delicate," replied Stella; "and we therefore lead a very retired life."

"I shall be contented with very little. I had hoped, considering the circumstances, that we

might have resumed in a degree the pleasant intercourse we had at Waterloo Cottage—our readings, our duets. I am not to be quite banished from Silver Hill, I trust?”

Stella was silent: she had none of the tact necessary for such occasions. With an awkward sincerity that made Mr. Smythe smile, she replied—

“I really do not know what to say. I will ask Mrs. Gantier;” and she held out her hand with—“I must wish you good-bye now.”

“Sans adieu,” was the gentleman’s reply.

That evening there came a note of three lines from Mr. Smythe to Stella, with a large parcel of books.

Every one has had years in their lives when all that surrounds them preserves a certain immobility; when the vicissitudes of fortune, and the attacks of death, avoid their circle. Then a time comes when they have to struggle in a perfect whirlpool of events.

For ten years the Gautiers had lived so quietly, so unembarrassed by changes, that Olympia, the one who had most to fear from mutations, had begun to do more than hope—she had begun to expect to enjoy peace for the rest of her life. The first break in this even course had been Louis's visit to England; and from that moment she had felt threatened.

Stella had been quite right in supposing that Mr. Smythe's eyes were wandering in quest of some one. Aunt Portia had been easily led to gossip about the family at Silver Hill, and Mr. Smythe had thus heard of a Mrs. Olympia, who was neither the wife nor the sister of Louis Gautier. There was some family tie, but Aunt Portia did not know what it was. The Gautiers were reserved people, never speaking about themselves; and when Miss Lowe had come to live near them, she had found Mrs. Olympia there. Yes, she was sure about the relationship. She had heard Stella's father drop some hints, that

poor relations stuck like burrs, when Mrs. Olympia had been mentioned.

“Was the lady young and handsome?”

“People’s tastes differ,” said Aunt Portia, “but there’s a sort of likeness in Miss Joddrell to her.”

Mr. Smythe’s fancy ran as much riot now as it had done in his youth: he was always attracted by the vague; his nature was speculative; so when he was at Silver Hill, he was thinking more of the unknown Olympia than of Stella. Mr. Smythe had not changed from what he had been twenty years previously. It suited him to visit at Silver Hill, and he was resolved not to be repulsed by any coldness or hints: he would allow of time for Mr. Gautier to return his visit, and then take his own way.

A few days after Louis did call on Mr. Smythe, and returned from the visit seriously disquieted. Mr. Smythe had heard from Mr. Boyick (Mr. Joddrell’s successor in the office of Custos), that various overseers had reported to him of unlaw-

ful assemblies being nightly held on the properties under their charge. Some of these overseers had ventured in disguise to these meetings, and they declared that the speeches made there were all calculated to inflame the passions of the blacks. They were told of the sympathy of the people of England in most exaggerated terms, and that Mr. Smythe and many others had brought to Jamaica sums of money for their manumission and support; and that after Christmas they would see the truth of these assertions. It had become evident to all men of any reflection, that the time for conciliation was past; the difficulty was to avoid collision: all that could be hoped now was that, by a display of force, disorder might be kept down. Mr. Gautier did not repeat what he had thus heard to any of his family: he only mentioned, that it had been thought expedient to call out the militia before Christmas.

Of all his annoyances as a planter, this of the militia was the severest to Louis. He

detested above all, the vulgar excesses which appear an obligatory accompaniment of the meeting to eat and drink after the fatigues of the day. Nevertheless, having chosen his place in the world, common sense told him he must comply with its exigencies. Inexperience and disappointed passion had precipitated him into a position most repugnant to his nature, and out of it he had never been able to extricate himself. Most reluctantly, the day after his visit to Mr. Smythe, Louis dressed himself in his uniform, and thus metamorphosed appeared at breakfast. To say the truth, Louis, a handsome man in any dress, did look peculiarly well in the blue and silver of his regiment; and Stella, girl-like, expressed her preference for that dress over that of the white jacket and broad-brimmed Panama hat, her cousin's usual attire.

Louis shrugged his shoulders, saying, "The white jacket is the comfortable garb of freedom, fair lady—this is a badge of servitude; and in

proof of my words, I must eat my breakfast without thinking of any one but myself, if I mean to escape a reprimand and a fine."

By some accident, there was no one in the room but the cousins; and Stella, forgetful of their late estrangement, was excessively busy, almost merrily supplying his plate, and filling his cup.

"Basta!" he cried, "I am not Captain Dalgetty providing for the future. By the by, Stella, what books were those Mr. Smythe sent you?" as he glanced at some richly bound volumes on a table near him. "Show them to Olympia before you read them."

"Cousin Louis, you forget I am four years older than when you first knew me: I was twenty, three weeks ago."

"Why did you not tell me at the time?"

"It was not an object of interest to any one but myself."

"How do you know? It was an uncharitable

thought, Stella," said Louis, in a voice from which he had not banished all tenderness. "Never have such again, will you promise me?"

She did not venture to speak, but she looked at him, with her beautiful eyes full of tears, and held out her hand to him across the table. Poor young thing! there was not the shadow of any pretence to disguise her feelings.

Louis took the pretty hand between both his:—"Dear little cousin ——", he began, but suddenly his countenance changed: Mrs. Gautier and Olympia were just coming in.

Louis dropped Stella's hand quickly, walked to the piazza door, and whistled for his horse. Returning, he hastily embraced the Maman, ran down the steps, giving a military salute to the two younger ladies. None of the three women left their position as long as they could see the top of the feather in his cap, waving in the morning breeze. All that morning, Stella sat by the Maman's side, pensive but not sad. She



was still under the spell of Louis's gentle words and tones. They were like some newly gained treasure, so long had she been weaned from any such. If he did not care for her, he would not speak to and look at her in that way. Olympia it was who threw her shade over them both. How his face had altered when he had heard Olympia's step; and then Stella's heart sank for a moment, but only for a moment. The honey she had gathered that morning soon smothered the drop of gall, and she became pensive again, but still hopeful.

Olympia was occupied with some of her elaborate embroidery, labouring at it mechanically, trying to imagine some way of extricating herself from the net she had unconsciously spread for herself. "Caught! caught! I will interfere no more with Stella: fate fights for her. What if I confess all to Gautier?"

The three women might have sat as models of Resignation, Hope, and Fear.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE BRINK OF A PRECIPICE.

AND what was Louis Gautier thinking as he rode on his solitary way? He was fighting with the same thoughts that had banished sleep from his weary eyes for many long nights. He was aware at last, that the *statu quo* he had counted on as possible for several months, could not and would not continue. He was a man, and not an angel. The veil with which he had perhaps half-wittingly enveloped his situation, was forcibly lifted away that morning.

He was as sure now of Stella's growing love for himself as of his own for her. She was only repelled by his coldness, and he had given her proof of how real that was exactly



half an hour ago. He felt again, as he recalled the scene at the breakfast table, the soft pressure of the lovely little hand; saw again that sweet, honest smile of love; visions of joy rose up and dazzled him: he would not look at them, and jerked his bridle so sharply, that the high-bred Kaled reared, and for an instant or two, Louis had to occupy himself in behalf of his neck instead of his heart.

Presently he re-knotted the thread of his thoughts. Renunciation for himself, he could determine on; he could accept of the desolation *her* absence would bring upon him. Ah! how should he live? Well, he could try; but to know, as he did know, that he was about to stab that warm, innocent heart, given to him with the frankness of a child, yet with the controlling modesty of a woman—how was he to bear *that*, and live? such knowledge would steep him in a depth of agony he had never yet sounded. “All my own fault! all my own

fault!" he exclaimed. None of his theories, which had helped him into this slough of despond, helped him out of it now. None of his diatribes against the lightness of woman's nature, of her slavery to dress and society, her inability to stand such potent auxiliaries as "time" and "distance" when employed against her love—no, none of his bitter declamations were so good as to console him now. He even felt friendship as inimical to him, and was horror-stricken at having shut himself out from that union without which a man, sooner or later, finds his life incomplete,

In this easy state of mind, foreseeing what his course must be, yet shrinking from it as from a crime, instead of the duty his conscience announced it to be, he reached the end of his ride. Once more among a group of men, noisy, excited, full of alarm, foaming with wrath, Mr. Gautier had to forget the lover, and remember his individuality as a slave-holder and planter.



He rode home late in the evening; he wished to avoid seeing Stella that night; he dreaded meeting such another look as the one of the morning. The fierce struggle between his honour and his love was over. He clearly comprehended the present, and he must not trouble himself with the future. The information gained during the day was precise enough to have made him desirous, even if Stella had been his bride, to have sent her from the island. As her guardian it was his part to ensure her personal safety. He would indeed have been thankful to have known her to be already on her way to England. He could not contemplate the isolated position of Silver Hill but with terror. If the dreaded emergency arrived, what could one man do against hosts? Die—but not save. He should use his guardian's authority, and he would send his mother, and Olympia with her, as far as Kingston. He would not allow of a day's unnecessary delay: she must be away before

Christmas. A death-like coldness crept over Louis as he thus decided. So, then, love—real, exalted, vehement love—was again burning up his heart; not a puny flame, that reason would be able to put out. He realised the strength of the new guest, now that he was trying to rid himself of it. It had come so quietly, that it had slipped unperceived into his soul; and with each day's habit, had worn a deep place for itself, without shock or excitement. Yes; love, almighty love!—he who had believed his capability for such a sensation lost. Yes, he who had echoed the most contemptuous sarcasms launched by ancient and modern in every known language at love—he—he loved as warmly, as fondly, as purely, as he had done in his early youth. He almost felt a contempt for himself. There's comfort, however, in the recollection that what has once been extinguished can be so again. No! there's no comfort in returning to his bitterness. "My darling! my darling! and must I

give you up!" that was the true cry, struggling forth with each breath that he drew.

Mr. Gautier shunned the interview Olympia showed him she desired: it was by his mother's bedside that he related the rumours rife both in Kingston and the surrounding districts, of the ill-humour of the slave population. It was holding the Maman's hand in his, that he found courage to say, that such being the dangerous state of the island, he intended to insist on his cousin's immediate return to England; but he warned both his mother and Olympia not to touch on the subject of impending danger from the blacks with Stella. "It would half kill her," he added, "to think she was leaving her friends in any peril; and it might be impossible in such a case to induce her to obey me."

The Maman would not, and Olympia dared not, ask him on what grounds Stella's consent was to be obtained.

"I shall send you both with her to Kingston,"

summed up Louis, "and you must remain there until I can believe in the safety of Silver Hill. You will do so for my sake, poor Maman." And Louis put the hand he held to his lips.

Olympia scarcely noticed his unusual coldness to herself: her heart was throbbing with joy at the issue from her most pressing danger which this plan presented. It would give her breathing time: she had still some chances in her favour.

The next afternoon, when the Maman was busy with her needlewomen, and Olympia in the counting house, the unconscious Stella seated herself at the further end of the front piazza, with one of the books sent to her by Mr. Smythe. It was a volume of Wordsworth. She was not reading attentively; rather idly turning leaf after leaf, only stopping when a line here or there caught her attention.

In a little she heard a well-known step, and saw Mr. Gautier decidedly coming towards her. It

was so unusual an occurrence for him to seek her that, after the first bound of happy surprise her heart gave at seeing him, her emotion changed into something not unlike fear. His face looked dragged, as if he were over fatigued. When two persons who love one another are in presence, they act and react on one another in a strange, supernatural manner. Stella instantly, before Louis had spoken a word, perceived in him the signs that are the precursors of a storm. Yet he was sitting very calmly by her side; he had taken the book from her hand, and in silence was turning over the pages. At last he made a pause, his finger accentuating, as it may be expressed, three lines of one of the smaller poems. Stella looked down to see what they were, and read—

“True dignity abides with him alone,
Who in the silent hour of inward thought
Can still suspect and still revere himself.”

Stella watched him as if he were reading over her death-warrant; yet what could these words

have in common with him or her? She exclaimed, without waiting to think further, "Cousin Louis, what is the matter?"

"You have always been a docile, obedient ward," he began.

"Take care, cousin Louis. You want to bribe me to do something. I am not a child to require the edge of the cup to be sweetened to make me swallow a bitter draught."

"You have been studying your Italian to some profit," he answered. How is it, when hearts are breaking, that men and women can speak so conventionally?

"Do you remember our talking once about friendship?" he went on.

"Yes, very well—just as if it had been only yesterday. Cousin Louis, what is the matter?"

"We are friends, are we not, Stella?"

"Are we?" And the valiant eyes turned full on his, seeking to penetrate into his thoughts.

"Cousin Louis, tell me what you have come to say?"

"I have come to ask you to sacrifice your inclination to my wish—to the wish of cousin Louis." He felt as if he were seething the kid in the mother's milk.

"Anything, anything, cousin Louis," she said breathlessly.

"Then you will consent to return immediately to England." It was said in a hoarse voice.

"Leave you, cousin Louis?" burst forth in such a beseeching, childlike voice.

He could not stand it. He rose and was walking away, when she called out, "Come back, cousin Louis: do not be angry with me again."

He seated himself by her, in a sort of helpless way, as if courage and recollection had deserted him.

After waiting in vain for him to speak, she asked him again, "Why must I go away?"

He had forgotten all but one thing. "Because

I love you," was on his lips. He never could understand how he did not fall at her feet, and tell her of his love—that he loved her more truly, more fondly, than he had ever loved in his high youth. Perhaps it was her innocent question, "Are you ill, cousin Louis?" as she marked his changing countenance, that brought him back to the recollection of the task he had set himself. He answered her abruptly: "Because I have decided that it is right you should go."

"Olympia has advised you to send me away on account of Mr. Smythe. I will tell Mr. Smythe before you, cousin Louis, that I do not wish ever to see him any more."

"Olympia has not said a word on such a subject to me."

A few months ago, Stella would have continued her accusation of Olympia. She sat looking at her cousin now; with a white face, and eyes out of which all light had faded.

"I will not deceive you, Stella, I never will; so

help me God!" said Louis with manly energy. "I have more than *one* reason for wishing you to quit Silver Hill—to leave Jamaica. You once asked to be my friend, Stella. I hold you as a friend—the dearest of friends. Stella, do you believe me?—have you full confidence in me?"

"Oh, so full, so entire!"

"Then you will trust me; believe me honest in all, even if I only give you one—the least—reason for my prayer to you, to leave me—us——"

Louis's voice broke into a sob, checked instantly, yet not so instantly but that it had cut Stella to the heart.

"Tell me nothing, cousin Louis; I don't want to know. I am ready to go."

He sat quite still, his hand over his eyes, rebuked by the candid trustfulness of his young cousin. He had intended to use Celia's impertinent letter to himself as a cunning argument; he had intended to call on Stella to act so as

to spare him these degrading insinuations. To have had even the intention was as if he had been desecrating a pure shrine. He suddenly felt his head clear—all confusion leave his thoughts, like one carried forth from a hot, corrupt atmosphere into the fresh air of a spring day. Too late—too late!

“Forgive me, Stella,” was all he could say.

“Forgive you, cousin Louis!” and she smiled on him; he turned deadly pale, his eyes flashing as he received that smile. “Call me once again your friend, cousin Louis.”

“My friend,” he replied, and left her.

Stella was in a sort of ecstasy of suffering: she enjoyed it; it was for him! Come, more anguish! more torture! it will give her the measure, the height, the depth of her love for him.

It was clear as day that Stella's calm and Louis's strength were both factitious; the Maman

and Olympia carefully respected Louis's injunctions, busying themselves with the preparations for Stella's voyage. The plan of the two other ladies being to remain in Kingston after she had sailed was never told to her; and in the confusion and distress of her own feelings, many trifles that might have enlightened her on that head passed unnoticed.

"Keep my going away as quiet as you can: don't let any one know," was Stella's earnest request; "and also, cousin Louis, let it be quickly."

And Louis was anxious she should be away quickly, and on board a ship before the Christmas holidays—the time most dreaded by the planters, as then their negroes for a few days enjoyed comparative freedom.

A vessel was chosen in which a lady and her daughter had already taken a passage. After that the only occupation of which Louis seemed capable was the riding to and fro between Silver

Hill and Kingston. He personally escorted Stella's luggage to Miss Hawke's lodgings, where his cousin, his mother, and Olympia were to spend the night before the vessel sailed. Then, and not till then, did the house servants begin to suspect that the young lady was going away. Every time that her cousin arrived from town, Stella expected to be told that on the morrow she was to go. Every time that she received no such summons, she felt almost happy. If that moment of farewell could be spared her !

Nor was Olympia easy, even now when her most earnest desire was about to be accomplished. The dictates of truth and justice cannot be infringed even in secret, and permit the conscience of the defaulter to be tranquil. Besides, Olympia saw that life at Silver Hill would in future be a mere hollow semblance of what it had been. The sacrifice she had in a manner extorted from Gautier was too costly. She was not sure

whether or not he loved Stella, but she was certain he was sorely altered to herself. A painful constraint had grown up between them: she had scarcely exchanged a word with him since the day he had told her that Stella was going to England. She must and would come to some further explanation with him. Why could she not have waited a few days longer? What impelled her to seek to obtain by a sort of force that confidence which he so sedulously avoided? How often she asked herself those two questions in after years!

When she set off down the hill to meet him on his return from Kingston, whither he now went daily, she had not decided on what she was going to ask or say: all she knew was, that she would put it out of his power to shun her this time.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, at the hour when the negroes bring in grass for the cattle, that Olympia crossed the moat. She

then reconnoitred, through a small pocket telescope, the road leading by the gray rock to the river course. It had but one bend to prevent her sweeping its whole length with the glass.

A group of persons were at the further extremity, but she saw they were all blacks. She sauntered on very slowly, willing to keep within sight of the house. As the men she had descried came on, Olympia cast an upward glance at the terrace, and distinctly saw Stella's figure standing clearly out against the sky. She believed that Stella could see her; but, in fact, her small person was lost amid the maze of the luxuriant vegetation overhanging the path.

The voices of the approaching negroes grew audible, and the words of the song they were singing. Olympia turned hastily back towards Silver Hill, for she perceived that the men were drunk, and she fancied she distinguished Maurice's voice from among the others, and for this man



she had a perfect horror: he had more than once favoured her with looks of insolent admiration, and offered her personal assistance in a way that she loathed. He had discovered that she had refrained from any complaint of him, and it had lately taxed her prudence to keep out of his way. Ever since Mr. Joddrell's tragical fate, Olympia had more than ever decided on silence as to his behaviour.

In spite of her haste, the men overtook her, and they passed her quietly enough, slipping off the narrow path, holding by withes and bamboos to steady themselves. But these were only two, and she was positive she had seen three. The distant sound of the trot of a horse made her turn once more to see if Louis was in sight. She thought there was no danger now, so she retraced her steps with decision. She had reached the gray rock, when her further progress was suddenly barred by Maurice, who balanced himself so as to prevent any possibility of her

being able to pass on one side of him or the other.

"I'll trouble you to stand out of my way," said Olympia, with great courage.

But Maurice was royally drunk, which means he had forgotten his station altogether, and thought himself a match for any white lady in the land.

"Hi! Massa Gautier grand housekeeper—how ye do, marm? bery glad to see you, marm—me lub you wid all my 'art, marm," and Maurice seized hold of Olympia's arm.

The white woman, strong in the idea of her superior race, instead of screaming, twisted herself briskly round, wrenching herself from the slave's grasp, dealing him, with her small, delicate hand, a blow across the mouth. Maurice, too drunk to understand well what he was doing, closed upon her, and they were wrestling in deadly conflict, and she must have shared the fate of a sparrow in the clutch of a hawk, but for the



intoxication of her opponent, when Louis rode up to them. Her supple figure was writhing in her enemy's grasp, but she was still defending herself bravely, dealing a close rain of cuffs about the eyes of the Sambo, which half blinded him.

In the twinkling of an eye, Louis had jumped from his saddle, collared Maurice, and thrown him heavily on the ground. Every bone in the man's body rattled, but not a word did he utter. Louis took the bridle of his horse, and led the snorting, terrified animal past the prostrate body.

"Are you hurt?" he asked of Olympia.

"No; only flurried."

"Sit down on the bank for a minute or two. Your hand is bleeding—don't talk now; you shall tell me all by and by."

He tied his handkerchief round her lacerated fingers, lifted her into his saddle, and led Kaled quietly home.

"The man has never stirred," whispered Olympia, looking back.

"Probably he will sleep off his drunken fit there," replied Louis: "he is as safe there as anywhere."

CHAPTER XL.

OVER THE EDGE.

LOUIS had thoroughly lost his usual self-possession ; he was excited by the fact itself of having put forth his bodily strength — a power which all men of women born, abuse with a sort of rapture. In this case, there was every excuse for Gautier's violence. He saw a woman, and a dear friend into the bargain, struggling in the grasp of a drunken man ; and worse still, as his prejudices of caste made him feel, the grasp of an ignoble slave. In the whole scene there was what was peculiarly calculated to excite disgust as well as rage in him. No wonder he walked by the prostrate Maurice, saying, " Wait till to-morrow, you villain."

Olympia remained silent, though she felt a qualm at leaving the motionless figure unexamined.

"I shall take you round by the stables," said Louis. "I do not want the Maman to be disturbed and alarmed, or she will get no sleep to-night. Poor Maman!" he went on, "she is grown very old lately."

They found Stella on the terrace, where Olympia had seen her from the road below. It was the first time since she had promised to go to England that she had come to meet Louis on his return from Kingston.

"I have been alarmed," she said; "I thought I saw you fall from your horse," looking anxiously at Louis. "What has happened?"

"Your sage cousin has put himself in a passion,"—he tried to speak lightly—"and—that is the greatest evil that has occurred, except that poor Olympia has hurt her hand a little." There was something so forced in Mr. Gautier's indifference,

that its unreality was at once felt by Stella. "You had better have your fingers dressed as soon as possible," went on Louis to Olympia.

They all three walked towards the house. Olympia went up the steps: it seemed to her as if all will of her own had left her. Louis lingered, and Stella said to herself, "He wishes to tell me that the hour is come," and she remained by his side.

"How sweet the air is," he began; "will you take a turn on the terrace with me?" and he took off his hat to let the breeze blow through his hair. Deep natures are like deep waters: strong must be the impulse which moves them, but once stirred it is alike long and difficult to either to find again their level. Louis wanted soothing, and he instinctively turned to the quarter from which soothing would best come to him.

Stella, striving to hold fast her courage, avoided looking at him; she fixed her eyes on the sky. The sun had sunk below the distant mountains

which formed the horizon of Silver Hill, but his place was still marked by the golden light shooting up into some floating purple clouds.

Women, it is said, are always more self-possessed in certain difficult circumstances than men: at all events, it was Stella who now broke the silence.

Pointing to the chain of mountains, she said, "They remind me of the Jura, as we used to see them from our windows at Evian."

Louis's eyes followed the direction of her finger without his bringing his mind either to the actual scene before him, or the one his companion alluded to.

"Poor grandmamma! Do you know, cousin Louis, I have often thought lately that God took her away from this world in mercy."

"Perhaps. Who knows?" muttered Louis. "Life is one great mystery, and Death another."

"Cousin Louis, I wish ——" and Stella hesitated.

“What do you wish? You are not afraid to speak to me, are you?”

“Oh, cousin Louis! if you would *feel* that the good God is always watching over you, and all of us, I *do* think it would make you happier, and—and it would be such a comfort to me to know that you believe so, when I am far away from here.”

“My good little friend, I do believe most thoroughly in a beneficent God; but consider, could the world go on as it does if God really interfered with our daily concerns, as an earthly Father would do, preventing us from committing excesses, and guarding us from evil wiles?”

“No father can keep his son from doing wrong—none ever did, cousin Louis; but the Father consoles and encourages the son, when he comes and confides his sorrows to him. Very often, cousin, when I have been very, very unhappy, I have said, ‘Though all the world may misunderstand me, God does not,’ because He sees quite

into my heart, and knows all my very most hidden motives, and that is *such* a stay in sorrow ! ”

How was it that her voice stirred his recollections of long ago ? It was as if he had been listening to some once familiar music. How his boyhood started out from the past ! what a strange *mêlée* followed of persons, places, and feelings ! An agonizing, suffocating emotion seized Louis by the throat, choking back his words. People don't weep in such moments : their hearts bleed. He wanted to say, “ God bless you, Stella : ” well, he did not—he could not.

She suddenly took his hand. “ Cousin Louis, don't be afraid, I will be —— Your little friend will be brave. When am I to go ? ”

“ The *Vectis* is to sail on the 24th. ”

“ The day before Christmas. Just three more days here, cousin Louis. I have been so happy, ” and she gave a long look at all round her, “ and you have been so good, so very good to me. ”

"Don't say that, for God's sake, Stella."

"Yes, I want you to think of that when I am gone, and that I am quite contented, quite—quite." A little sob. "I am going to the Maman," and she ran up the steps.

Louis would have asked for one instant more, he had so much to explain; but she was gone. Why had she so cruelly heaped coals of fire on his head? Ah! poor little soul, she meant to comfort him; she was brave, for he could see her heart break in her sweet, pale, quivering face. He had been so good to her! How he laughed—no sob was ever more dreary. And now he might do as he liked with himself: he had proved his free will—he had seen the last of his good spirit—his guardian angel. Farewell! Farewell!

Till a late hour that night, Stella was engaged in carefully packing into her desk what were the most prized of her possessions, trifles to be

swept away by any one else. An envelope containing the remains of a white rose Louis had once brought up from the Botanical Garden for her—indeed, there were the petals of every flower he had ever by chance given her; one of his broken watch-guards, which she had kept, when she gave him another of her own making; and a very poor sketch in water-colours, copied from the picture in pretty Auntie's study. All these things marked certain white days in her life; and as she placed them in her desk, her heart was ready to break for cousin Louis. She thought over, nay she divined much that he had to endure in his life. So superior as he was, so unlike every one round him, and yet condemned to drag on the same life that was distasteful to the commonest white man in the island.

“What one must bear, one does bear,” said Stella to herself, her valiant spirit no longer able to fight away her tears. “Poor Maman!

she will miss me — she will miss her daughter.”

Of Olympia, she did her best not to think.

Once in bed, she made a rigid calculation of how many hours she had yet to remain at Silver Hill. Sixty hours: to her who had given it up as a home, this sum seemed like wealth. And after that? People do live through terrible sorrows, so I suppose I shall; yes, I shall suffer, but he thinks well of me, he approves of me, he won't forget me! How many agonized hearts that hope and belief have helped to strengthen!

The next morning, just as Stella was dressed, Olympia came into her room.

“Maurice is dead!” she exclaimed: “he was found dead on the very spot where we left him.”

“But it was not my cousin's fault,” cried Stella, running into the sitting-room.

Louis is writing at his mother's table; the

Maman is on his right, the fingers of her two hands interlocked, and her eyes fastened on the ground; her aspect that of one crushed by a blow.

"Cousin Louis, no one can blame you," went on Stella, grasping at his hand, which, in her intense sympathy, she kept pressing to her heart.

"As far as it was certainly not my intention to injure him, you may say it was not my fault. Do not be so alarmed. It can be considered but a painful mischance."

"Let your cousin finish his letter, Stella, before you ask any more questions. Do not prevent his having the benefit of being the first to require an inquest."

This was said by Olympia in such a tone of reproachful irritation, that Stella hastily drew back from Mr. Gautier's side.

"A few minutes more or less will make no difference," said Louis. "Old Sally was off by

four o'clock this morning, to give information and lay a complaint against me, before Mr. Smythe."

"How did she know you had anything to do with it?" asked Olympia.

"You forget the two men who passed you just before you met Maurice; for anything we know they may have witnessed the whole scene."

"Then they saw Maurice's assault; at all events, their testimony is worth nothing."

"I don't know that, but I am glad I have the testimony of my own conscience, that the man's death was through an accident, and not by any voluntary act of mine. Nevertheless, I am afraid an ugly business will be made of it: it will too well serve the purpose of those tampering with the negroes."

Mr. Gautier then finished and sealed his letter to the coroner of the district, a certain old officer, a Colonel Bagshot.

"My good, kind friends," said Louis, as he was quitting the house, to give directions to the

man he was sending to the coroner, "keep your minds as tranquil as you can. Any exhibition of extravagant fear would hurt my cause; and Olympia's testimony is all that is necessary to exonerate me of any criminal intention."

"Can I *do* anything for you, cousin Louis?" asked Stella.

"Perhaps you will kindly accompany Olympia when she has to give her deposition. I wish to God I could spare either or both of you so painful a scene, but the one will support the other."

Louis was at the door when Mrs. Gautier called to him—

"My dear, you have had no breakfast."

"Poor Maman!" he exclaimed; "how patiently you have been listening to us all, and never interfering even by a word!" Louis, scarcely less than the rest of the world, was apt occasionally to overlook, nay, to undervalue the gentle

and pious. We enjoy their happy influence in our homes too often without gratitude or acknowledgment.

The coroner and jury could not be hoped for, at soonest, before a couple of hours after noon, and it was now but a little after eight o'clock: nearly half a day to wait.

Mr. Gautier left the house after breakfast, and did not return, though there was no work going on in the field. The Maman had her orders to give; for being punctiliously hospitable, a second breakfast, or lunch, was to be provided for the persons coming to hold the inquest.

"Are you going away, Olympia?" asked Stella. "I meant to beg you to tell me what occurred between you and Maurice. My cousin said nothing to me last evening of how you had hurt your hand."

"Maurice was excessively tipsy, and was first insolent to me, and then used personal violence to prevent my passing. Gautier found him wrest-

ling with me, and knocked him down. Now I am anxious to be alone, to collect my thoughts. With your strength and high spirits, you are no judge of what a nervous person suffers at the idea of being questioned by a parcel of strangers."

Strange, but perfectly true, the moment she was left by herself, without any process of inferences, deductions, or demonstrations, Stella immediately and intuitively jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Smythe was Olympia's husband. No sooner had she come to this decision, than reasons crowded up in its favour. She remembered his having said she was like some one he had known; the disgust and aversion in his face at her saying she could dance a story to music. She remembered Lady Almeria's joking him about a dancer, and his wish to avoid the recognition of her ladyship. Olympia was a dancer, Olympia was separated from her husband, there was a likeness in herself to Olympia. And the

late scene in the mango grove between Olympia and herself? Could there be a doubt? She walked fast through the piazza, literally giddy with the thoughts that rose one after the other. What might not be the consequence of such a discovery? Would not Olympia have to go away? And then came a suffocating, blinding hope that she herself perhaps might not have to leave Silver Hill. With all her trust and confidence in cousin Louis, Stella had an idea that it was Olympia who was driving her forth from her Eden; but at this dangerous point her ruminations were interrupted by a succession of growls. "What can have brought Felicity from the kitchen?" wondered Stella, as she listened to the following monologue.

"Oh! Loramassy, my goodness gracious me! my ole bone dey sore, my skin sore, whateber de use 'case you be in trouble, you bring trouble to oder people, hearie you, Massa Louis, I speak to you, h-m-m? You no hold yer ugly head up

to vex a body in der straits; tak dat, know better 'noder time!" and Felicity knocked down the table napkin that had refused to take the shape of a mitre. "Cluck, cluck," went the old body's tongue, "me ask you now, worra ye no bear yer own trouble widout a boddering me; yer shoulder big nuff, big, like dis cuss tray. You too, you divil!" as the tray fell with a crash, "ebery ting turned topside down in dis worl—de young die, de ole dey live."

"I thought you loved your master, Felicity?" said Stella, now addressing the irate old woman.

"Beg pardon, marm, me no hearie well."

"I thought you loved your master?" repeated the young lady.

"Felicity. no hab master, marm, 'xcept," with a curtsy, "Garamighty Fader in Heben."

"I remember now," said Stella, "you belonged to the Maman, and she made you free."

"De law and me ownself set me free, marm.

I hab six chilren living, marm, an dat make me free, like."

"Have you heard anything about poor Maurice?"

"Me no hearie much, marm; dis no time to hearie much. I hearie dat Maurice hit stone—and stone kill him, hm-m. Some say Missy 'Lympia de deat of de sambo, me no sabey; pretty 'ooman, Miss 'Lympia, but me see ebil in her eye de fust day she comed up 'ere. Hi! Massa Louis his eye eat her up; she move about like fedder in the air. You raal 'ansome garl, like palm-tree, Miss Stella, but Miss 'Lympia she small and purty, hi!" and Felicity smacked her lips. "Hi, young lady, worra you go way, 'case why, eh?" and the withered face peered significantly into Stella's eyes.

"Because I wish to go back to England, Felicity," replied Stella, calmly.

Bery well, marm, me no hab nothing to say against it; me glad it no Miss 'Lympia get you

sent away, dat's all; me allays say, Miss Stella hab too much sperrit for act like one poor slave."

To change this dangerous subject, Stella asked—

"Was there ever an inquest here before, Felicity?"

"I tink so indeed," replied Felicity, indignantly stopping short in her work, and placing her arms akimbo. "I tink so indeed. Dere was fust ole Massa—he come 'ome dead on ironing board, like Maurice, dey say: he died someways no one can tell. Berry well, dat No. 1. Den Busha, he allays mortal drunk, he drop in de field, dat No. 2. Den dat Dennison, dat Missy 'Lympia she get flog, 'case no find de coffee bag—'case it stay in Kingston store for get sugar dat no tree."

"That will do, Felicity."

"Oh! berry well, you see I'se 'sperience dese matters. Miss Stella, dem' quests nothing at all.

Buckras come, cock dem eye at de coppse, Massa doctor tickle him wid de littel finger. Jidge and jury say, Garamighty him do it. No need be 'fraid, Miss Stella. Massa Louis no do noting. Maurice hit stone and stone kill him : quite right, when he sich big fool."

"I think you are a wicked old woman," exclaimed Stella. "I wonder you show so little feeling for the family who have always treated you so kindly."

"Hi, me missus, we all wicked vessels," and Felicity gave a sigh more like a groan.

The sound of the ring of horses' feet on the rocky path, made Stella run into the piazza, Felicity waddling after her.

"Who is that?" asked the young lady as the first rider came up to the door.

"Dat Colonel Bagshot, he hab place call Besom." Felicity meant Bergen-op-zoom. "Dat next one," with an accent of infinite contempt, "dat Busha from Rocky Valley, and dat, an dat,

dem ebery one Bushas; dat de doctor. Hi—dis one, raal gran genelman, fine man; me 'prove him now, me young garl; he de friend of de pore black man."

"Hi, young missus, dat person kiss the ground under young lady's feet: me sees him de oder day, hat in his hand, so sweet like. Mr. Smit, he de man for my money; he come from good King Billy."

Felicity had described the coroner and jury very correctly. Of proprietors, there was but Colonel Bagshot; the owners of all the other neighbouring properties were absentees, their overseers came in their stead.

CHAPTER XLI.

COME AT LAST.

WHEN all was once quiet in the house, Stella ventured out of her hiding-place to seek Mrs. Gautier. The Maman is in her usual seat, with the large Bible open before her. She beckons Stella to her side, points with her finger to a verse, but Stella shakes her head.

"I cannot see, Maman," and crouches down by Mrs. Gautier's side. The poor girl's heart is full of fear : the first excitement is over, and she is now picturing to herself Louis standing by the side of dead Maurice ; and the horrible stories she had read of the corpse bleeding when touched by the murderer, fix themselves in her brain and whisper there. But how cruel of her

to think of murder. How long will it last? What can they have to say, when the case is so clear?

There is a step on the terrace: she knows that foot which takes so firm a hold of mother earth. Louis is before her.

"Do not be alarmed, Stella; there is no cause to be so, dear Maman; but where is Olympia? She must be so good as to give her evidence."

"Olympia, why don't you come?" screamed Stella, stamping impatiently,

Olympia opened her door. Stella seized her by the arm, but Olympia, instead of coming forward, dragged Stella into her room. "Oh, Stella, help me! I cannot face my enemy before all those rude, vulgar men; and Gautier—he will hate and despise me."

"Then Mr. Smythe is your husband!" exclaimed Stella.

"Who told you? But never mind now. Keep me from him, Stella! Do something for

me! I cannot—I cannot meet him, and Louis looking on.”

“But you must!—you shall!” cried Stella, recovering all her recollection at the sound of Louis’s name. Are you going to put a man’s life in danger, because you are afraid of evil to yourself? If you do not go, I will; and I’ll tell the reason why you refuse to come, and Louis will despise you. Is that your affection—fearing only for yourself?”

“You are very heroic at my expense, Stella.”

“I do not mind in the least what you say or think of me,” said Stella; “but you must go.”

“There is only slaves’ evidence—there is no danger for Gautier.”

“But he must be cleared of all blame: you shall not allow a doubt to overshadow his character. Go!” went on the inexorable Stella, “and I will never tell Louis how you have hesitated: you shall have all the credit of the sacrifice,” she added bitterly.

"Send Gantier away: I will go by myself."

"You are not intending to make your escape?"

"Of what avail? You know my secret. The wounded deer is tracked to its covert."

Stella left her for an instant. "My cousin is gone," she said, returning. "I will accompany you; and neither Mr. Smythe nor any one else shall come near you while I am there."

Olympia threw a black lace veil over her head, and accepted the support of Stella's arm, who quite forgot that she was walking through the sun bareheaded.

Stella had no sooner secured the advantage for Louis, then her heart began to quake for Olympia. The one was not more trembling than the other as they entered the large room of the sick house. Negroes crowded it to suffocation, for Mr. Gantier had expressly given permission for all the property hands to be present who chose to be so.

Olympia took the chair Louis offered to her; Stella refused to sit: she stood behind Olympia's chair, her hands resting on the back, in the unconscious attitude of a guardian angel. Once again Louis recognised her resemblance to Raffaele's archangel in the Louvre.

Curiosity attracted every glance first to Olympia: none of the white men assembled there, excepting Dr. M'Neil, had ever done more than catch a passing glimpse of her. Mrs. or Miss Olympia was an unsolved problem in the neighbourhood. A child is not more eager after a secret than a man. A lady with only a Christian name was a mine for conjectures. She must show her face now, and speak out.

But while all were inquisitive about Olympia, there was not one present whose better nature did not bow down in respect before the young girl Stella, whose beauty was so manifestly the incarnation of a pure heart.

You may perchance, reader, have remarked

the sobriety the entrance of a modest young girl will produce in any assembly of persons. It does not require beauty to effect this—it is the real virginal nature, unscathed by evil passions, that excites a feeling of almost reverence. It is a something different from the veneration we feel for tried virtue in matronhood. To a wife or mother, cognisant of all the littlenesses of humanity, the sinner can humble himself, without feeling an impassable gulf between them: not so with an innocent girl. Words are involuntarily chastened before her, wit repressed, allusions avoided: in her form, the ideal of purity is worshipped, and this without the witchcraft of classical outlines.

It had been seldom, or in forgotten days, that any of these men had come into the presence of a creature like Stella. Those loud, cruel, uneducated, sensual men lowered their eyes and voices with involuntary humility. Thank God! none of mankind are so hardened that, for a time

at least, they do not feel an enthusiasm for the representation of what is good.

Surely those twelve persons there assembled were odd specimens of the creation. Men, the purple of whose faces, their misty eyes and sodden features, found an explanation in the long tenpenny nail hanging as a badge at their button-hole ; that nail measuring the depth of the rum in each tumbler, drained many times a day. Men who could not sign their names until one or two such draughts had been swallowed. Others, lean, yellow, with red-rimmed, sunken eyes, above their leathery lantern jaws : these were the cruelest ; the men striving to make money, honestly if they could, but money at any rate. One or two late importations of book-keepers there were, like Mr. Boggis, with the freshness of home still on heart and face, and lastly two as fine types of manhood, in Stapylton Smythe and Louis Gautier, as the world could show.

Every one of them, from the highest to the

lowest, felt themselves kept in check by that beautiful girl ; her eyes so full of divine pity as they travelled earnestly from one face to the other, full of sympathy as well as pity when they met Louis's glance.

The irreverent and careless tone of the investigation was dismissed, and, " Your name, Madam?" asked the Coroner, addressing Olympia.

She put aside her veil, showed her waxen white face, still very lovely, and pronounced quietly, " Nena Smith, born Perez."

Mr. Smythe started to his feet as she removed her veil, and in that instant Louis comprehended that he saw Olympia's husband. What a rush of conflicting, confused feelings overwhelmed him.

The fatal precipitation of his own resolves, the entanglement in which he was wrapped, the deceit, if not treachery, of one on whom he for so many years had leant in trusting friendship—one thought coursed after the other, like wave on wave,

bruising and stunning his heart. He felt ready, nay, burning with desire, to take vengeance on himself.

When he recovered some portion of self-possession, Olympia had just finished her deposition, and Mr. Smythe, in right of his claims as slave-protector, was plying her with a volley of subtle and searching questions. The jurors one and all guessed that something of more thrilling interest dictated this bitter cross-examination than desire for elucidation as to a slave's death.

Olympia's eyes met those of Mr. Smythe firmly : they seemed, as she looked, to grow to a point and pierce him, as a sharp weapon might have done. He winced. Mr. Smythe was not so clear of conscience that he dared to run to bay that irritated woman.

Colonel Bagshot (the Coroner) at length interfered, and said it was clear as a pike-staff, no other conclusion could be come to, than that the unlucky

Maurice had met his death by what the law called misadventure.

Mr. Smythe begged to remind the Coroner
“that dead men told no tales,”

“A very unfair remark,” replied the Coroner
“for it conveys an insinuation of the truth of
what both the witness and Mr. Gautier have said,
for any doubt of which there is not the least proof.”

Mr. Smythe said it was not likely that there
had been any conduct on the part of the deceased
to justify Mr. Gautier’s violence, and he repeated
again that it was well that dead men *could* tell no
tales. “I apply for the inquiry to be adjourned,
though I am sorry to disturb the touching
unanimity of coroner and jury as to the cause
of the death of this poor black.”

“A man and a brother,” interpolates, in an
ironical tone, one of the yellowest, thinnest men
in a white suit.

“Mr. Gautier is aware,” went on Mr. Smythe,
“that I am under great obligations to him; there-

fore he will not mistake my motives for pressing for an adjournment of this inquiry. I warn Mr. Gautier that I shall endeavour to have the matter taken up by higher authority than that of the coroner of the district."

"Hear, hear!" cried two or three voices, jocularly.

"Better days, good days ——" resumed Mr. Smythe.

"Wish we could see them," cried out one of the jurors.

"Better days," he proudly affirmed, "were at hand, when the abnormal protection now provided for one class of his Majesty's subjects would not be required: he alluded to his own office as slave protector."

"We don't recognise you or your office," cried several voices.

"Yes, a good time was at hand," went on Mr. Smythe, "when the black would receive his rights, and be declared equal in the eyes of the law,

as he was in those of the Creator, to the white. Listen, my black friends," turning to the negroes; "I am ready at all times to give you the benefit of my advice. Remember, your hours of labour are limited, and measures are being taken for your emancipation by the good King of England and his ministers."

"Garamighty bless King Billy and Massa Smit to eberlasting glory," shouted the blacks, understanding of the harangue only this, that it was in their favour.

The Coroner twirled his thumbs as he listened to the oration of the fine gentleman.

"Be quiet, you black idiots!" he cried, "and be off out of this, every man jack of you, and women too, hearee!" When the room was cleared, the angry old man said to Mr. Smythe, "Thank you, sir, for your word in season. Gentlemen, I propose a vote of thanks to this worthy stranger, who has picked up an appointment dropped from the moon; for no one on earth knows what a 'Slave

Protector' is!" Then passing from his attempt at sarcasm to the broad reality of passion, "I look on you, sir, by G—I do, as a pestilent incendiary; and by G—if we have an insurrection, as I devoutly believe we shall, I'll shoot you, sir, as I would a mad dog. It's not the blacks that will plan an outbreak; so I warn you, I shoot a ringleader, black, white, or brown, and be d—d to slave protection. Jamaica is a morass, gentlemen, and we are floundering in it, and very soon the quicksands below will be above our heads."

Here one of the wisest of the jury whispered to the Coroner, who, wiping the angry moisture from his brow, exclaimed—

"Verdict! Why where's there any room for doubt?"

Mr. Smythe said—

"Allow me to claim your patient attention for a minute, Colonel Bagshot. As for your threats of personal violence, they are beneath my notice. Whatever your verdict, I shall not alter my in-

tentions a tittle. I apply again for an adjournment."

"Can't see any grounds for assent, sir. If you can discover anything, *do*; no one prevents your going to Old Nick to ask. I don't care a Scotch boddle for you, or your protestations, or applications. In all countries, among Turks or Anthropophagi, a man has a licence to defend himself, without mentioning a helpless woman. I'd like to see the nigger that would raise his finger to me; I'd crack his head as I would a cocoa-nut—the thing it's likest, by jingo!—and any man's afterwards, who dared to say I hadn't ought to. Verdict!" he repeated; "well, gentlemen, I suppose we are agreed: if we ain't, say so. What do you call this transaction?"

The foreman of the jury said, "They all were of opinion that it was what the Coroner had styled it—a misadventure."

"You hear, Mr. Gautier, our inquiry has terminated: the transaction is a misadventure, in

so far as you have lost a slave, but the island is a gainer, in that it has a rogue and incendiary the less. My respects to your good mother. Ladies, your obedient, humble servant," and with a bend of the body, the pale reflection of what had been his best bow when a young man, Colonel Bagshot, dragging at his braces, waistcoat he had none, was slipping heavily by Olympia, when Mr. Gautier said—

"One word, Colonel Bagshot, before we part. I am obliged to you and the jurors for the confidence you have shown in my word. Mr. Smythe has, however, made too grave a protest against your verdict for me to let the inquiry end here. The Custos is absent in Kingston; I shall therefore ride down this very evening, and offer to surrender myself to undergo any further trial or examination, that can satisfy the most intolerant suspicions."

"Lord, my dear sir, what's the use?" exclaimed the Colonel, "and who the deuce is going to

relieve you would willingly kill a fine slave? Preposterous! I wouldn't believe it, if dead men did tell tales. Don't you do it, Gautier—it's a bad precedent. Let's see you soon at Bergen-op-zoom."

Olympia all this time, and while the jury were taking their departure, had sat as still as a statue. Stella longed to leave that dreadful room, to go to the Maman, but she had no courage to move.

When only Olympia, Stella, Mr. Smythe, and himself, were left, Louis went up to his cousin, and pronounced the monosyllable, Go!"

She looked round, and saw Mr. Smythe watching them.

"Cousin, you ought to go at once to the Maman."

"Go, Stella!"

"Let her stay if she chooses," said Olympia, breaking her silence; "let her be an impartial

witness of what must take place, I suppose. Mr. Smith, have you anything to say to me?"

"To ask forgiveness for my unpardonable intrusion, and to withdraw, would doubtless be my duty," he answered, re-seating himself, and scrutinizing her with curiosity. "Ten years, the length of the siege of Troy, must have no doubt given you a hope of impunity for the rest of your life. Be satisfied: I have no wish to disturb your happiness, nor probably have you any design on my liberty. We might give the readers of newspapers the enjoyment of a scandalous story, but that would be a certain evil against an uncertain good. On the whole, I had better let you wander about the world, calling yourself Helen or Diana, or any other appellation you think appropriate."

"You are a bad-hearted man," flashed out Stella, "to take such a cruel advantage of your position."

"Those are hard words in the mouth of an

old friend, Miss Joddrell," sneered Mr. Smythe. "Allow me to observe, in my turn, that you take advantage of your position as a woman."

Mr. Gautier bade Stella go, with a look and a gesture which admitted of no further objection. She took Olympia's arm, and they passed out of the sick house first, the two gentlemen following.

Louis had needed all his self-control, to keep him from giving way to the leaven of resentment, which was fermenting within him, at the part played by Mr. Smythe in regard to himself, and especially at his coarseness to Olympia. He had felt the whole time, that under the present circumstances, he would not be justified in realizing the threat, of which he had once made Stella the confidante, viz., that if ever he and Olympia's husband met, it would be in deadly struggle. But if morally handcuffed, in so far as Olympia was concerned, it was otherwise

as regarded his cousin and ward. He was free—nay, in duty bound, so passion prompted—to resent the taunt implied in Mr. Smythe's last words to her. So he said, lowering his voice, "I wish you to understand sir, that there is not one of the words which you could not resent as coming from a woman, that I do not endorse—I, a man."

"Do you indeed!" observed Mr. Smythe, with a diabolically provoking smile.

"Yes, all and each of them. To-morrow, I shall be occupied in town with this business. Once that is arranged, I shall be to be found, either there or here."

"I wish you well through your occupations," retorted Mr. Smythe, his face livid with anger and hatred: there was something unnatural in the sight, for his features were not made to express strong passions. "It is not my intention to make any demand on your time. It is part and parcel of my philosophy, not to

think any woman worth the risk of a man's life."

They had just reached the upward turn of the path to the house, as he spoke these words. Olympia suddenly confronted him, saying, "Mr. Smith, our road and yours do not lie further in the same direction."

"You are both kind and candid. Have you nothing further to say?"

"Nothing."

"I suppose I am not to know, or inquire, as to what life you mean to lead in future?"

"The future is neither yours nor mine."

"Very true, if not novel. Then farewell! Allow that I am most accommodating. And now as to your kind hints, Mr. Gautier, all I can say is, that I have noted them, and ——to our next merry meeting."

There was both irony and bravado in the emphasis laid on these last words. Mr. Smythe turned on his heel, and left them. They could

hear him whistling, what Mr. Gautier and Olympia recognised as Macheath's air,

"How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other dear charmer away."

Louis neither spoke to his two companions, nor looked at them, as they pursued their way; but Stella, for the first and last time, saw his face suffused by a deep red flush, like that of one determined to bear mortal agony without uttering one groan. Let that human being who has never experienced the cruel pang of the break-down of his confidence in a trusted friend, be very thankful for the mercy; it is an anguish past words.

Mrs. Gautier was seated where Stella had left her. The Bible indeed was open before her, but her eyes were cast down, her hands clasped in her usual attitude of passive resignation. It seemed as if she could not be roused to any active sign of distress. She waited like one schooled in suffering.

"The verdict was 'Death by misadventure,'

mother," said Louis. "However, I must go to Kingston this evening, about the matter. Our new neighbour, Mr. Smythe, in his character of slave protector, is inclined to dispute the fairness of the award." Mr. Gautier sat himself down in the low chair, Stella's customary seat.

"I am very tired," he added, and placed his head on the Maman's knee. "There is a noise and a singing in my ears, as if my head were under water."

The words were scarcely uttered, before he fell asleep; a sudden, deep, dreamless sleep, which sometimes knocks a man down as with a blow, after an overpowering mental excitement.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DANCER'S STORY.

STILL holding by Stella's arm, without more than a glance at Mrs. Gautier and her son, Olympia went into her own room. She almost forced Stella to sit down on a chair by the window, while she herself took a seat directly opposite her.

Stella hesitated to look at her companion; there was still too much of the heaving of the recent agitation about her to allow of anything like reflection or judgment. She stared at the extensive view, not with enjoyment or consciousness of its beauty, but with a strain to trace every indentation in the chain of the distant mountains, the blue summits of which were

scarcely to be distinguished from the sky. Olympia scanned Stella long, then she said, in a dry staccato voice—

“There is a Spanish proverb which affirms, *Dos pardales en una espiga, hacen maladiga*. You don't know Spanish?—it means, Two sparrows on one ear of corn make ill agreement. Do you apply it?”

“No,” replied Stella, gravely and coldly.

“That is, you will not. However, it is not bad advice, and I am going to follow it. I, the oldest sparrow, mean to take flight, and leave the corn undisputed to the young one. There can be no use in your going to England now; you had better say so at once, in your own frank way, to your cousin: it would be too mortifying if both sparrows flew away.”

“Why do you purposely add bitterness to what is already bitter, Olympia?”

“I don't do it purposely. Every drop of blood in my veins has gall in it. Do you expect to

get figs from thorn-trees, or honey from wasps? The same hand made thorns and wasps as created figs and bees. Every creature and thing lives according to the nature given to it. You have no right to find fault with the one for wounding, or to admire the other for its sweetness; rather ask why should there be thorns or stinging insects? What have I done that my whole life should have been so warped, and split, and lacerated? I have never committed any crime. God help me! I have been nothing worse than a fool—a blind fool; as many women are, have been, and will be.

“I was once a public target for Cupid’s arrows. Richard Smith, for that’s his real name, was among my adorers: he was the poorest.

“Did I love Mr. Smith? In truth, I can scarcely answer. A woman cannot help taking an interest in a man who has asked her to marry him, and with whom she has decided to pass the rest of her life. Besides, though I belonged to the stage, I was not protected by that cuirass

of experience worn by many of my playfellows, poor good souls ! better I believe in their errings than I with my sang-froid and prudence.

“ I will tell you what *did* invest Mr. Smith with a degree of fascination for me : his power, as I thought, to take me out of *my* class into *yours*, Stella. I was as pure as a woman of my profession can be, who has eyes, ears, and understanding ; but I had no illusions as to heroes. I was too early behind the scenes. I had never had any youthful dreams. I had always been close enough to the realities of life, to see its repulsive features very clearly.

“ What irritated me most in my position was, the weights and measures used by such as you for such as me. I declare to heaven, I believe that women before the footlights imagine that the women behind them are born to a different morality. I was a good daughter. I worked for my daily bread ; I gained it honestly, spent it honestly. I never turned away from an un-

fortunate who was poor, though I did not consort with the unfortunate who were rich. Yet none except my comrades and my mother held me as a respectable member of society. Ah! it's always a long story when one gets on one's wrongs—when one wishes to give reasons for a stupid step.

“For a time, the passion that predominated in me was ambition to be acknowledged respectable by the privileged class. I knew the pretender to my hand was poor—probably over head and ears in debt. Though I was beautiful, I did *not* think—not quite, at least—that he was in love with me. Women, in all their blindness, have illuminations of themselves and of others. Strange it is how they consciously, voluntarily, shut their eyes, when the gratification of a passion allures them. Passion, Stella, includes many other items besides love; though young ladies, and old too, have an idea that it is only a proper word when it is used to

denote a fit of anger. Ambition, all selfish interests, my dear novice, are stronger than the passion of love, when a man is above thirty, and a woman twenty-five.

"At first I said to myself, It is a fair exchange—he gives me the station I covet, and he takes my money. I had, of course, after being so long a favourite with the public, realized a considerable sum—sometimes my hands were filled to overflowing with gold. Little by little, however, other and softer thoughts crept into my heart or brain—I don't know which. My betrothed was uncommonly handsome; his voice perfection; and to these gifts he added an amount of general knowledge, that wherever I saw him with other men gave him a clear superiority.

"I was first gratified, then proud, and presently he became as a god to me. Plenty of proofs to the contrary had I, to be sure—no lack of inconsistencies and meannesses: my penetration served



me abominably well, and yet I was carried away by the new feeling that had taken possession of me. Once he should have ample means, those flaws would disappear: no one, till tried, can tell how the want of money may lower a man's idea of what is strictly honourable. Such was my argument. Ay di me! Mr. Smith was my husband! That word 'husband' has a magical power over woman, Stella. I do not believe that any bride ever pronounced it for the first time, without recording an unbidden, secret vow to love and obey. My belief is, that if a man could only be really tolerably unselfish with his wife, no wife but would sacrifice heaven and earth for him.

"I was no longer Nena Perez—I was married, covered with respectability from head to foot by that ægis, the title of Mrs. Richard Smith. I shall not tell you what a fool I was for some time—how I enjoyed going as a spectator, as *Mrs. Smith*, to operas and ballets. How I played

at being a bourgeoisie, dressing soberly, and keeping household accounts ; putting myself to school with all sorts of teachers, to learn to be my husband's fitting companion ; et cetera, et cetera. I suppose no one escapes living in a fool's paradise once in their lives.

“ You think that human beings are always all of a piece—that Mr. Smith must always have been bad, and that your cousin Louis, for instance, never had a weakness.

“ Hm ! I am going through a course of philosophy for your benefit. Believe me, Stella, men and women, the very best of them, are unstable : no one is constant, no one invincible ; unless, indeed, those who have the temperament of stagnant water. Happiness and sorrow, love and hatred, fear and courage, alternate in our souls, and during their various reigns we are various characters. It is not duplicity makes us so—we are instruments on which the passions play ; as well accuse your piano of duplicity, because it



is as willing to afford you merry as sad music. Lastly, never look for durability on this side the grave."

"And our will, Olympia—does that play no part in our lives? I feel I am no puppet at the mercy of every blast that blows through my soul—I can choose between right and wrong."

"And you think, poor child, that by choosing the right you insure happiness? You think it is my own fault that I am wretched?"

"No, no, Olympia, I am not such a child but that I know that there are lives which seem fatally pursued by sorrow after sorrow, and it would be wicked of any one to say that it was the sufferer's own fault. Only I believe, that with the sense of having done or tried to do right for God's sake, we can bear our trials. Oh, Olympia! look at the Maman, so sorely afflicted as she has been; and yet she does not call herself *wretched*. After all, it is but for a few years."

“My dear, I am delighted that you are so easily satisfied; I strongly advise your remaining in your present frame of mind, willing to wait patiently for your happiness till you go to the next world. I don't know whether you are to afford me an example of what I have never yet met with, except in old-fashioned novels—I mean, of consistency; but this I assure you, that of all the many common human pendulums peopling the earth whom I have known, my husband was the one that swung most continuously between right and wrong. If he had had a little more heart, or a little less, I think he might have been a successful man. He was overbalanced by his vanity. I have often heard the remark, ‘Oh! how full of vanity he or she is!’ and few seem to think that vanity is beyond a puerile fault. I am sure it is the prolific mother of crime. The very meanest phases of vanity were Mr. Smith's: he was essentially what a clever writer designates as a ‘woman astonisher.’ He

frittered away in some woman's boudoir talents sufficient to have gained him a solid fortune. At the instant when some effort of his own or of his friends,—and he had more than once a devoted friend,—was about to be crowned with success, he threw away the substance to flutter after some whim—some painted butterfly. One might have forgiven him had he lost the world for a Cleopatra : but, no : the third-rate goddess of a third-rate town had the same force of attraction for him within her sphere, as the Juno, Minerva, or Venus of Olympus. I needn't tell you that, for you have seen him at work.

“Mr. Smith, after his marriage, became a picture fancier. I can see him now,” said Olympia, while her face contracted with an expression of pain and disgust, “pointing his long, thin, white fingers at some hitherto undiscovered beauty in some of his wonderful purchases bought for nothing, sold for something ; the buyers generally cut him afterwards—it did not matter, he could

always make new acquaintances. Then he became a writer of pamphlets on commerce—that brought him into the company of some of the more responsible members of society. He travelled, leaving me with my mother in Paris.

“After one absence unusually long, he returned in the most sanguine and affectionate of moods. Do you guess why? He was ruined; or, rather, he had ruined me—that was all. I was a dancer, you remember, and never had thought of the sensible arrangement of a marriage settlement. When I gave myself, I gave all my worldly goods into the bargain.

“Certain bills must be paid, or he would—don’t laugh now, Stella—or he would cut his throat. Yes, and he actually did give it a scratch, sufficient to send specks of blood on my white dress, and to terrify me into the only fainting fit I can boast of. The upshot was, Mrs. Richard Smith must resume her name of Nena Perez, and pirouette money into the conjugal purse. Hop,

hop! presto! prestissimo! higher! higher yet, Nena!

"It takes a good deal of heartlessness, Stella, to make a woman give up a man she feels is dependent on her—it does, indeed; besides, Mr. Smith's health was delicate: he looked dying: that was a part of his luck. Well, I did return to my profession, though I would rather have taken in plain work. For his sake I danced, and I succeeded in clearing him of debt.

"Young girl, did you ever try to picture to yourself what hell may be like! what the continual burning and the tearing of your flesh by fiery pincers is like! and worse still, what it is to be hopeless—for ever and ever hopeless?" Olympia rose, and walked up and down the room with a quick, hurried step, speaking in an excited voice. "Fancy it all, and you will not reach to what a weak, vain, selfish man, with low,—low ambitions can inflict on his wife and family. I see in your eyes a proud look,

which means that you could never be taken in to link your fate with such a man. Not if he carried his character printed on him in large letters. Was not Eve taken in by the serpent and his brilliant coat? Words can banish reason as much as strong liquors do: they go to the head, if not to the heart.

“Mr. Smith veered to every point of his character while I was yet with him. His pursuits were equally varied. He was scientific, and on the eve of a great discovery in metals; industrial, and he was to become a partner in a first-rate manufactory—a speculation, of course. His ventures were sometimes in the sentimental line. He had a new host of Platonic friends, and got together quite a nice little collection of china and articles of vertu, a nice little library of poetical works, elegant bibles and prayer-books, sacred lyres and dew-drops, to add to the one contributed to the general stock at the time of our marriage. Oh! it was odious in every way!

“As he seldom dined at home, he grudged every one of our table expenses; he grudged me even the barren title of his wife—he did indeed, though I was putting clothes on his back and food into his mouth. He did that wrong, however, carefully; he did not intend to deprive himself of the goose that was laying the golden eggs. Nevertheless, the report came to my dear old mother’s ears. She had borne a great deal cheerfully for my sake; my mother, one of your grandmothers, Stella, was a good woman, though only a Spanish street-dancer. She did not silently endure this last insult. My hero threatened to turn her out of doors; he did not do so, merely because he knew I would have openly exposed his conduct, and had Mrs. Richard Smith printed on the play-bills. I made a vow then, and I have kept it. It would have broken that old woman’s heart had I done anything that could have given a sure foundation for scandal. So I bore and forbore, as long as she lived. Till her death

I was Mr. Smith's marionette—after that, vogue la galère.

“When she died—the only creature who ever really loved me—I laid the half of the last salary I received in my husband's desk. He was out that day at a picnic in the suburbs of London. I went and had a view of him reclining on the grass at a flaxen-haired English girl's feet. I overheard his whisper to the young creature's mother or aunt: ‘She is a girl to live and die for;’ and then I turned my back, left him to his fate, and went to seek my own.

“Do you know what I did? Having just lost sight of my mother in the grave, and had a glimpse of my husband, as I have stated, I had small chance of keeping my head steady enough to guide the capering of my feet. So I took my passage to a French island, and to make it difficult to trace me, called myself Madame Olympia. My aim was to reach Jamaica—to seek your father, Stella. He had been my

sister's husband, and he was literally the only connection I knew of in the wide world. He was rich, well born, and had married a poor, unknown girl. Ergo, he must be a large-hearted man, and would assist me—protect me.

“When I arrived in Jamaica from Guadaloupe, Mr. Joddrell was in England—had taken you thither. I remembered Silver Hill; I had played there when a child. I remembered that Mr. Gautier, the present proprietor's father, had saved all our lives. I could not recollect ever having seen the Maman, but then had not my sister been her adopted daughter?

“For once, I was lucky. I was received,—oh! so kindly! Louis Gautier had but just arrived: to mother and son, I told my story, the whole of it. I concealed nothing; neither my real name, nor the paltry motive which had helped to make me Mrs. Smith. The good souls comforted me—promised me shelter as long as I needed it.

"At length, your father came back from England, and I had an interview with him. He was civil; offered me money, if I wished to return to Europe, or go to America; he advised my going to New Orleans, and said he was willing to establish me there as a dancing mistress. I saw he felt that I was a family connection to be decently smothered. He greatly approved of my not calling myself Nena Perez: it was too celebrated a name, he said gallantly, to suit my wish to remain incognita even in the mountains of Jamaica. I might have done so, as you saw to-day, without any risk to myself. Not one of those twelve men pricked up their ears when I pronounced it; not even that old war-horse, Colonel Bagshot, who must have been on the Continent when the name of Nena Perez was ringing as far and wide as that of Napoleon or Wellington. So much for fame!"

Stella was surprised at Olympia's tone of pique as she thus alluded to herself. Strange,

she could have such recollections in an important crisis of her life like the present, thought the inexperienced listener.

Olympia, after a short silence, continued:—
“The fact was, your father did not wish his marriage with Pepita Perez to be talked about: she was under the ground; what would be the use of raising her? He laughed when I refused to be called Smith, assuring me it was a capital travelling name. I must have gone to America, but that Mrs. Gautier and her son bade me remain at Silver Hill, if I could be contented in such a solitude. God bless them! they never made me feel my dependence: they made me one of the family. Did I say, I was happy for years? It was Elysium to me. For the first time in my life, I had companionship; and what did I care for so-called society? Your father preserved my secret, as it was his secret also. That I was a mystery, and that the planters’ ladies shook their heads about me—that even Miss Portia gave me her

coldest shoulder—was not worth even a smile. Besides, I had served my apprenticeship to that sort of thing.”

Olympia ceased speaking, nor did Stella interrupt the pause. She longed to hear more; for now came the breathless interest of the story for her.

“What a home it was!” sighed Olympia, “till you made it into purgatory, Stella. Very soon I shall be in the lowest circle of the tortured.”

Olympia sat with her face buried in her hands, her two elbows on her knees.

“Did you know it was your Mr. Smythe who was my Aunt Dashwood’s friend?” asked Stella briefly, without noticing Olympia’s last words.

“If there were any use in saying ‘No,’ I would say it, but I reply, ‘Yes.’ The description was too accurate to allow of mistakes: in spite of the Y and the E he had adopted—in spite of the

Stapylton—I knew it must be him; it was all so characteristic of Richard Smith.”

“Then why did you not tell my cousin? He knew your story already.”

“You think it so easy, do you, always to see your way. You will find out the contrary, before you are much older. Why did I not tell? There were a thousand Why’s. I was afraid on my own account—afraid for Gautier. I hated the idea of any discussions about me. Louis might have been prejudiced against me, with Mrs. Dashwood at hand to point the moral of my tale. I could guess the mercy she would show me, and I was not ignorant of the instability of human beings—even of Gautier, Stella. I have learned only to reckon on myself, for myself. Some of your dreadful good people would have been reading the marriage service to Mr. Smith—perhaps subscribing large sums to send him after me. Don’t you know what a rage there is for doing good and peace-making in the world? No: I could not write the

acknowledgment; and when Gautier came back, I believed myself safe. If I cursed you, and wished you evil upon evil, it would be only natural. You it is who have brought all these troubles on me. What is there about you, I wonder, that catches men's hearts? You'll allow, I must have had a treble sight to have foreseen that my husband would cross the Atlantic after you. Droll enough that he should find me instead. It's like one of Harlequin's tricks."

"You are mistaken in your suppositions about Mr. Smythe and myself," said Stella.

"Do call him Smith, girl. What! didn't he smile in your face, and tune up his voice to nightingale sweetness, when he answered your naïve questions? Didn't he make you understand that however he might pay compliments to others, what he whispered to you was as true as the sun which shineth by day? Has he never stood by your side, and looked unutterable things at the

moon which shineth by night, or at the stars, when there was no moon. I know it all by heart."

"He did, I think, try to make me like him; but it was not in that way. He was really kind: he used to teach me."

"Little idiot! However that may be, heaven, or something else, has decreed enmity between you and me, Stella—we cross one another every way: the cards favour you just now, but we shall see whether you will succeed in binding the sacrifice to the altar. If I have lost the place I held with Gautier, I fancy I have effectually prevented any other from occupying it. He would doubt an angel from heaven now, and I am glad of it."

"I do not know, or wish to know," replied Stella, "whether Mr. Gautier's feelings towards you have been such as to prevent his forming an attachment to another woman: but this far is clear—that not even your unfortunate

position gives you a right to suppose any unwomanly step on my part."

Stella spoke with a calm dignity Olympia had never noticed in her before. It stung her into saying—

"You know that you refused to go to England after your father's death, because you loved Louis."

"By what right do you seek to penetrate into the secrets of my heart, Olympia? If I do love my cousin, I break no law in doing so."

"You shot that arrow at me, but it does not hit. What allows you to hint that my feelings for Mr. Gautier ever went beyond the strict limits of friendship? Your residence here is one proof that they did *not*," added Olympia, haughtily.

"Then, why be so cruel and bitter to me?"

"I cannot help it. Go away; the sight of you hurts me more than anything else. Leave me alone."

Stella rose to obey in silence.

Ere she reached the door, Olympia called out, "How tall you are! It never struck me so much before, though Gautier wrote me that your height spoilt your looks—at least, in his opinion; and Stella——"

Stella fled from the bitter woman.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TIME WANES.

A GREAT mixture of feelings warred in Stella when she obeyed Olympia's command to leave her, and made the girl unwilling, almost afraid, to go where she might expect to meet Mr. Gautier.

Stella had long ago understood that Olympia was in secret her enemy, and the confidences just received had apprised her of nothing new in this respect. Many of us smother a discovery, in dread of the desolation its bursting forth into light may bring us. Doubt and distrust once hatched grow quickly, for they find plentiful food in inferences. The confirmation of the fact of unworthy rivalry gained from the lips of her unhappy relation, made Stella



inexpressibly miserable—more miserable than she had ever been. She shrunk from the recollection of her cousin's call on her to return to England, and of all it implied. The very flash she had noticed in his eyes when the recognition had taken place between Mr. Smythe and Olympia—even the resolute manner with which Louis had avoided all speech with Olympia—were to Stella revelations of how deep the stab, and dear the hand which had inflicted it. So ingenious are girls in love to torment themselves!

The reader, unlike poor Stella, need scarcely be told that other feelings than those of wounded affection had kindled in Mr. Gautier's eyes that angry fire noticed by his young cousin. Resentment at the discovery of a patent duplicity, shame at having misplaced his trust, remorse at having committed an injustice towards Stella, had had their full share in the shock experienced by Louis. The twinkling of an eye had sufficed to make him perceive that Olympia was

aware beforehand of Mr. Smythe's identity with her husband.

For how long or how short a time had she had this knowledge? Most likely ever since his letters to her from Waterloo Cottage. And yet she had received his written communications about Mr. Smythe's attentions to Stella in silence; his spoken fears with shrugs of her shoulders, or exclamations against the folly of girls.

How many more secrets might have been equally well preserved! how many equivocations might he not have accepted as God's truth!

Louis was in the mental condition of a man walking leisurely on a well-known smooth flowery path, under whose feet a sudden earthquake opens a bottomless abyss. But all these reflections on his part Stella was far from divining. She lingered in the back piazza, and mingling oddly enough with her anger towards

Louis, was an indefinite disturbance at her own daring in thinking any ill of him. She felt that to meet him without explaining that she was offended and aggrieved would be a sort of treachery; and yet how was she to speak out her dire suspicions? She was bitterly unhappy, forlorn, and weary; inclined, as the unhappy too often are, to inveigh against all the world.

Just then she heard a distant tapping. The instant that faint sound broke the tranquillity of the air, it recalled one of pretty Auntie's songs to her memory, "The wood-pecker tapping the hollow beech-tree." She had been gloomy, and coldly hard, ever since leaving Olympia; the new association of ideas gave her the relief of a good fit of crying.

"Stella!" said a voice that had never named her before without her responding to it with delight. "My poor child!" went on Louis, taking one of her hands in his.

"I am very unhappy, cousin Louis. You

were quite right not to wish me to come to Silver Hill."

The moment the words were spoken they were repented of. Louis did not answer immediately; he was not a man whose emotion ever evaporated in words: he was too shy and sensitive for that. He was gazing at Stella keenly, and she saw the twitch in his face that she had learned long ago to recognise as a sigh of his intense mental discomfort.

"God forgive me, Stella, for any grief I have ever caused you." His voice was like a cry of pain.

Though really repentant of her harshness, Stella could not yet show that she was so; she was haunted by that horrible, unspoken jealousy—yes, horrible, it ought never to have had the slightest cause to exist. Louis must have known the nature of Olympia's sentiments for him, and if he did (why did she think an "if" possible), then as he had not altered his behaviour—

had cruelly wished to get rid of her to please Olympia—then he was—he must be Olympia's accomplice.

After the one glance that had shown her his look of pain and wonder, she had stubbornly kept her eyes turned away from him.

"I have made a cruel mistake," went on Louis; "but, Stella, I have been guilty of no treachery."

She shrunk all into herself; she who had been wanting to explain for herself would not allow him to do so; she was unaccountably afraid—her passion had vanished suddenly at those few words. She recklessly asked,—“What is that noise, cousin Louis? It makes me think of England.” Why had she said that? “I mean it reminds me of Auntie's song of the woodpecker: that was what made me cry?”

No answer. Louis was beginning to see clearly into the workings of Stella's mind.

She went on more nervously than before.

"But woodpeckers are only English birds, are they not?"

"They swarm in our fields of Indian corn, and love decayed cedar-trees. But that is not a woodpecker you hear, Stella. That rapping is the carpenter nailing up Maurice's coffin. The burial must take place at once. I sent for our clergyman, Mr. Eff, early this morning, but he is absent. There is no alternative: I must read the service myself."

Tears—soft tears—clouded the eyes she fixed on her cousin now, and she asked humbly, "May I go with you, cousin Louis."

"I sought you for the purpose of begging you to do so. I wished to make sure of one friendly heart, among those I have to meet."

"Oh! thank you, cousin Louis." It was all she could say in the way of asking pardon.

"My good little cousin!" He was gazing abstractedly out of the window, like one who had no purpose in view.

Louis had been blinded, stupified by the knowledge that had poured in on him with the suddenness and rapidity of a flash of lightning. He was in a state of positive physical, as well as moral distress—aware that he had much to accomplish quickly, or there would be worse in store for him, and yet hindered and impotent like one in a nightmare.

Olympia's goodness all a lie; Stella driven from his home; the uselessness of that great sacrifice; Stella now suspecting that he had made a scapegoat of her, to save another from suffering. He wanted to say to that young girl with the valiant grave face, standing by him, "For pity's sake, stay by me! Rescue me from the maze into which I have unwillingly strayed!"

But Stella also was tongue-tied by her own sensations. No, no: this was not a moment when these two aching hearts could reveal themselves to one another; and the time is short, very short, that remains to them for giving or

receiving confidence, consolation, and pardon. The *Vectis* is to sail the evening before Christmas Day, and this is already the 22nd of December.

“Massa!” called a black from below the window.

“Is it time?” asked Louis, starting. Then to Stella,—“Now shall we go?”

Excepting the bearers of the coffin, not a negro appeared at the burial ground. Added to the sadness and solemnity of the ceremony, there was a sinister presage in this absence of Maurice’s relations and comrades, for the blacks are great sticklers for all observances.

It taxed Stella’s firmness to repeat the responses distinctly, for she saw more than one heavy tear drop from her cousin’s eyes into the loose heap of earth at his feet. Louis remained looking at the newly filled grave, in the same sort of abstraction as had overtaken him at the piazza window, and Stella waited anxiously by his side. She was afraid to try and speak words of comfort,

just as she would have shrunk from touching any bleeding wound. At last, he looked at her, and observing her eyes shining with tears, he said abruptly, "Stella, can you ever remember my giving you a joy? There! don't answer. Now then, return good for evil, and say, 'God bless you, cousin Louis!'"

"God bless and preserve you, cousin Louis!"

He was turning away, when a nameless fear made her stretch out her hand and seize his arm. "Cousin Louis, where would a letter find you?"

"I shall be back before any letter could reach me."

"Yes, but in case you might be delayed."

"I always go to Miss Hawke's lodging in East-street."

The commonplace words and tone assured her.

"Will you ride alone?" she asked again, as he whistled for his horse, Kaled answering the signal by a neigh of pleasure.

"No one will meddle with me, Stella. Keep up the Maman's spirits."

She walked with him to meet his horse, which he had trained to come and go without any groom. She saw him spring into the saddle without using the stirrup, and in spite of daily familiarity, she was struck by his appearance of strength and his fine figure.

Stella went to the terrace before the house, and had another view of rider and horse passing the gray rock, the scene of yesterday's tragedy. Only yesterday! and it seemed so long ago.

Stella sought the Maman. She was restless, as she had not felt since she had determined to return to England. Impatient also at the confusion of new ideas rushing through her brain—phantoms of possibilities routing away all the impressions and sentiments of the last few weeks. Who has not known what it is to be haunted by a shadowy something that is to interfere with the fulfilment of some dreaded event?

Stella presently stopped her pacing up and down of the room. She sat herself down where she had seen Louis sit in the morning, and she also laid her head on Mrs. Gautier's knee.

"Maman, will you be good to me, and say some of your pretty verses? Put your hand, Maman, on my head, and take away my irritation."

The old lady passed her hand softly over the waves of the girl's hair, as she repeated those lines of Spenser, beginning—

"All in the power of their great Maker lie.

All creatures must obey the voice of the Most High."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWENTY-SECOND OF DECEMBER.

At the hour for tea, Olympia joined Mrs. Gautier and Stella. She sat, as was her custom, at a little table, with her reading lamp and book. The only thing about her which indicated any consciousness of a change, was a shortness of speech and a brusquerie very unusual; for Olympia possessed in a high degree that manner which the French designate under the word *aimable*: no one more gifted with the talent of paying little attentions, and of making them show to the best advantage. This evening she neither trimmed the Maman's lamp nor offered to arrange her knitting for her.

It was in vain that Stella tried to imitate the

composure of her companions; every slight noise made her start. When for, perhaps, the twentieth time she had run into the piazza, Olympia asked impatiently—

“What or who are you expecting, Stella?”

“I don’t know. I can’t tell what is the matter with me; but every instant I fancy I hear some one creeping about in the piazza.”

“The rustle of falling leaves,” said Olympia.

“There!” cried Stella, jumping up again.

“A bat disturbed by the light.” Olympia rose as she made this answer, and looked into the piazza. “It is to be hoped you are not going to set up as a rival to Miss Portia Lowe, in seeing visions and dreaming dreams.”

“I am sorry to be so teasing,” said Stella, trying to sit quiet.

“Let us take a turn on the terrace,” proposed Mrs. Gautier; “come with us, Olympia!” she added kindly.

The night seemed only a gentler day; the

dark blue sky studded with stars, shining in bright rivalry to the moon, now so near its setting that it seemed hovering over the jagged summit of the far off mountains, looking by that light more a gray mass of clouds than solid earth. The land wind had not yet come down from those sublime heights; not a breath of air sighed in the trees, nor whispered in the leaves of the oleanders and orange-trees. This unusual stillness had not varied since the hour that Stella had remarked it, when listening to the hammering of the carpenter fastening Maurice's coffin. The three women walked slowly and silently up and down in front of the house, each occupied with her own thoughts.

The lower edge of the moon dipped behind the mountain, and instantly, as if kindled by the touch, a narrow, high, dark red flame shot up against the pure sky: another rose to the right—to the left—a chain of fires.

In horrible expectation, the three beings on

that platform waited for the next revelation of what at once they knew to be the signal of rebellion. They had not long to wait; up from the foot of the hill on which they stood, came rolling a luminous smoke, its highest curl glittering with sparks, until it suddenly broke forth into a wide sheet of flame.

There was no sky, no stars, nothing of heaven to be seen now. More lurid smoke, myriads more of sparks, another and another sheet of lurid flame. The coffee walks, with their rich, ripe crop, are on fire—so is the mill, the pulping house, the sick house, the stables. Hark to the shrill neighing and shrieks of mules, horses, and cattle! Something more appalling mingles and rises above the cry of animal pain: the shout of human beings full of hatred, envy, and revenge; the wild laugh of savage joy over destruction; the wilder song of savage triumph.

It is come at last—the inevitable, fatal moment for the struggle between the oppressing and the

oppressed. Hear what they sing; it is their Marseillaise—the song their fathers had sung through Kingston streets in 1799.

“One, two, tree,
All de same.
Black, white, brown,
All de same,
All de same.
One, two, tree.”

“Oh, Maman!” whispered Stella, throwing her arms round Mrs. Gautier, “thank God, Louis is safe!”

“The fire will be seen miles round,” observed Olympia: “we shall soon have help. If we could only hide ourselves for an hour.”

Mrs. Gautier shook her head.

“Impossible! where can you hide on this rock? Every side inaccessible, but the one where the road is.”

“Hush! they are coming, they are coming,” cried Olympia, catching at Stella’s gown. The song was changed now.

"Jackass, wid him long tail
And bag of coffee coming down, } bis.
You dar worry me,
You dar teazy me,
You make my Sambo dandy leave me."

That was screeched by women's voices : this by
men's :—

"John Crosstree was a dandy, oh !
Hi ! me dandy, ho ! my dandy."

Nearer, yet nearer, and the shouts grew more
meaning :

"Earie, Earie, Earie, Miss Lympia, na ma qua,
She kill de black man, massa kill de Sambo,
Dey both as sweet as sugar candy, hi-oigh."

"They are coming to kill me," muttered
Olympia through her chattering teeth. The
allusions were clear to Denniston's death—to
Maurice's—alas ! both to be traced to her.

"Let us go to the back of the house !" dragging
at Stella.

"They will find us directly," said the Maman,
with wonderful composure : "any show of fear
will make them worse."

“Stand behind me, Olympia. I have never offended any of them.” Stella placed herself in front of the terrified woman.

Waving lighted torches, blowing conch-shells and cow-horns, beating tom-toms, singing hymns, screeching ribald songs, up the zigzag path, rushing, leaping, brandishing grass-knives and hoes, came a multitude of negroes of both sexes. They spring up the house steps, clamber in at every window, they spread themselves round the house. So dense the number in that small space, so thick the air with the smoke from a hundred torches, that the three ladies at first escaped notice.

Peals of laughter echo through the chambers of the pretty dwelling; tables, chairs, books, clothing are tossed out among those outside; figures more like apes than aught else are dancing about dressed in Gautier's white shirts, in the ladies' dresses and bonnets. The air is rent with whoopings, guttural screams, with all the various furious cries of licence and thirst of vengeance.

“Ye mad debils!” shouted a woman, “ye no earie de red-coats a coming, dem swords clashing, dem guns firing.”

“We make bonfire light ’em on de way,” bawled out a wag, setting fire to the light curtains, while torches were thrown hither and thither at hap-hazard. The dry wood of the jalousies, of the walls, of the flooring, caught like tinder.

“Hoorah! Hoorah! Hi—oigh!”

The mighty blaze showed the ladies to the furious mob—the shouts ceased, and the rebels stood motionless, only for a very few seconds. What feeling caused that silence—that panic? The feeling that the wild beast has for its keeper? or some of man’s better instincts towards the weak—the helpless? God knows!

A new incident set the whole swarm of blacks in motion again. Some of them had driven up an ox which had escaped from the burning stables; the poor animal was thrown alive into the burning house.

"Fine rossbeef. Christmas beef, marm," said one fellow, pushing up to Mrs. Gautier.

"Hi! Massa say, niggers work 'xcellent well. Coffee aal aff de bush marning come."

Loud laughter welcomed these words; they broke the spell: first came bitter sarcasm, then a pelting with insulting language; the worst passions were in the ascendant; the men pressed on the ladies; they were almost suffocated and blinded by the heat, the smell, and the smoke.

"Keep heart, young missus," whispered Rebecca's voice in Stella's ear. "Lookie dere! soger offisher."

Stella did look, and saw by the light of the fire the unexpected apparition of a giant clad in a red coat, with golden wings, his mighty arm uplifted and dealing blows, right and left, with his sheathed sword, on the heads about and beneath him. Was this the god Mars himself, or Telamonian Ajax?

The giant has rapidly cleared a space about

himself. He is standing with his eye-glass fixed in his eye, taking a cool survey of the scene. Lesser giants are whacking about them, and many broken black crowns are the consequence. Stella could not mistake those goggle eyes, that snub nose, the half-open mouth.

"Tom! Tom Hubbard! come and help us!" she screamed.

"Hallo! who's that?" returns the giant.

That cry of Stella's had recalled the blacks to their certain prey. Once more there was a tossing of men and women; a multitude of them surround the half-dozen red-jackets; the odds are too many.

"Fire!" cries the officer at last, but he is fighting his own way to where the ladies are, by dint of muscular strength; he deals heavy blows with his sheathed sword. It is not in such an ignoble struggle he will fling the scabbard away!

Stella almost touches him; she reaches out her

hand ; a stout black makes a snatch at Olympia ; with all the energy of despair Olympia clutches at Stella, hangs on to her, twines her arms about her ; the two women are forced back—back—further and further from their deliverer ; the jerk with which the black lifted Olympia in his arms sends Stella reeling ; the earth sinks away from under her feet. She is falling fast—faster—down the most precipitous side of Silver Hill.

She did not lose her senses ; she knew her danger—was aware that below her lay sharp rocks, and below them again, a deep, stony gully, and that she was out of all human aid. Countless thoughts course through her brain ; on and on she slips—slides—cannot catch at one of the jutting rocks ; the stones roll from beneath her and carry her down, until with a great shock she falls into the middle of some large bush. Bruised, nearly stunned, she laid fast hold of its branches, quite conscious enough to fear to move,



lest she might be sent on a precipitate flight to the abyss below. The first effort Stella made was to say aloud the Lord's prayer; she wanted to steady her mind; she could have declared she heard the ticking of half-a-dozen watches round her—it was the pulses of her own head. She cannot pray; her thoughts wander; she sees the Maman with her long, floating, white hair; she must be growing crazy, for she is sure that Tom Hubbard was near her when she lost her footing. Tom Hubbard! how could he be at Silver Hill? She ventures to open her eyes; she wants to see some reality: it is dark; not a sound breaks the utter stillness. All at once she fancies she hears a stone fall, fancies blacks gliding like serpents towards her; she tightens her hold of the saving shrub, and tries once more to pray; if she could get rid of those whirling, fiery, red spots that dance before her!

What is that? Two sharp, loud reports of a gun ring through the air; Stella answers them

with a long scream, and then listens painfully, but no other sound came.

Something cold glides over her neck—her flesh creeps with a new horror, and then she guesses it must be a lizard, and thankfully remembers that Louis had told her—it seems very long ago—that there were no venomous reptiles in Jamaica. Ah! poor cousin Louis! the thought of him brings back full consciousness; her bosom heaves as if it would burst with her quick sobs. Her thought of him becomes a prayer—a real prayer; not a multitude of words, but a silent heart-prayer for mercy to him, strength for him. Staring into the darkness, she prayed on and on till the deep shadows began at last to pale before the coming dawn; a chill air made the leaves of Stella's refuge tremulous; a faint twitter of birds, and then a tender yellow light came and chased away the gray of night. It is a new morning.

Stella sees now that she has been saved by

a large ginesta or Spanish broom, "that lover of solitary, deserted places," rooted in the cleft of a rock. No more shrubs beneath where she lay; nothing but gray rocks, with surfaces like the teeth of some gigantic saw, looking as if hurled down there in wrath, stood between her and an unseen depth. She must not trust herself with another glance in that direction. She turns her face upwards; nothing but rocks tossed pell-mell, with one narrow stony channel between some of them, and down which had she rolled; a little to the left, or to the right she must have been dashed on those bristling projections, that set her trembling even to look at. There is a heavy flap of wings close above her head; and she recognises that large, hideous bird, with black body, bald head, and red throat, called by the negroes John Crow — the chief attendant on death, the scavenger of the island. Another and another flap slowly by her. New terrors begin to frame themselves—it is so lonely

around her, now these unclean birds have sailed out of sight. Does every one believe her dead? Are they seeking her crushed limbs in the ravine, or have all her friends fallen victims?

Stella fears to move; she fears to stay. A tiny something, dazzling bright in the first rays of the sun, whirrs fearlessly across her face. It is "the least of the winged vagrants of the sky." To Stella the lovely little creature comes like the dove to the patriarch of old. She revives at the sight of his beauty—she watches his manœuvres among the bright yellow blossoms of her ginesta. For a second or two he poises himself so steadily that she almost loses sight of his wings, but she sees his eye glancing with quick vigilance ere he thrusts his long tongue into the flowers. With one happy chirp, he darts away, his glossy green back and red collar flashing in her eyes as he passed.

There he is a yard or two above her, a little

to one side, dressing his smart plumage on the dry branch of a straggling wild coffee sapling, which Stella had not remarked before. Laying herself with her face to the hill side, she drew herself up towards the little beauty. Another chirp—this time of defiance—and away again; he is greedy, for now he forgets her, to hover over a wreath of the purple bells of the fior di notte—she lays fast hold of the bind-weed. Whenever Stella nears the tiny fellow, he is always off again with a merry chirp; but stay! the low, significant whistle of human lips distracts her attention, and she loses sight of her fairy guide.

“Hallo! I say,” exclaimed a well-remembered high treble voice.

Stella does not hesitate now to raise her head—she meets the anxious, eager gaze of a pair of goggle eyes, in one of which is inserted an eyeglass.

The owner’s long length must have been lying

prone on the earth to bring his good-natured bull-dog face into the unusual position in which it fronted Stella's upturned eyes.

"Tom! is that really you?" cries Stella, in a weak, broken voice.

"Is that a really flesh and blood Stella Joddrell? Tang mieux, as mamma used to say. Now don't go to try to stand up. Creep nearer—nearer yet. Now catch that!" and he threw her one end of his military sash; "tie it round you—make it fast somehow, for I am going to haul you up by it. Don't be in a fright: you're as safe as if you were in a church."

There were no flowers, no shrubs, no humming birds now; within six feet of the terrace the hill was almost as sheer and as smooth as the side of a house.

"Are they all safe, Tom?" asks Stella, breathlessly, as he puts out one of his large hands and catches hold of her.

"All as right as a trivet!"

As soon as the friendly young giant got a firm grasp of her, he dragged her up on to the platform, and for a minute or two stood contemplating the forlorn, dishevelled, ragged figure with great contentment. He holds her two lacerated hands in his, and his pressure is like that of a vice; he coughs, clears his throat, tries to laugh, and does not; at last he literally bolts out—

“By Jove! Never was so glad in my born days. I thought you were done for. I *am* glad—and what a go, Stella! ‘Ours,’ only landed in Kingston the day before yesterday, and I had as much idea that you were one of the people we were sent to help as that it was the Pope of Rome.”

“And every one is really safe, Tom?”

“Oh, yes! the ladies are safe enough: a plucky old chap took ’em away with him—a militia colonel. I stayed to look for you, but we didn’t know which side to look. It all turned out for the best, that we hadn’t gone away, for—for,

Stella—I say—no need, you know, to put yourself in a fright——” He stopped.

“What is it, Tom?”

“A—a—a—a, he—he—he—he has only fainted, you know.”

CHAPTER XLV.

A DOUBLE SHOT.

THE last words came out glibly; for Stella had pushed Tom Hubbard aside, and seen at a glance what threatened to make a tragical end of her personal history.

Cousin Louis was stretched on the ground, his head resting on the knee of the sergeant left to keep guard with the big lieutenant.

Stella threw herself down by her cousin's side. Her lips opened wide; you saw the effort to shriek, but no sound came. If it had formed itself into words, it would have been—"Oh! pray, God, take me too—if he must die, let me die—pray—pray!"

Her eyes strain so on to Louis's face, that the

soldier, O'Halloran, says compassionately, "Miss, you see he has been shot in two places—he ain't noways dead."

"Yes," said Tom; "up here he came at a tearing gallop—stared at the burning house, and us—no one else here, you know—never spoke a word, but just dropped off his horse—where you see him, of course. I knew him again directly, and thought, 'It's quite natural, old boy, you shouldn't like what you see overmuch,'—but we hadn't an idea he had been shot, till he told us himself."

Stella's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; she raised the dark hair off Louis's cold moist brow, on which was printed the dent of mortal anguish; she bends her cheek close to his blue lips, to feel if he still breathes.

"Oh! *do* help him—don't let him die, Tom!—don't let him die!"

Tom actually blubbered like a child.

"Praps," says O'Halloran, "Miss can say where there be a doctor."

"Yes—yes, good man—there's a doctor close by."

"I'll go for him," says Tom.

"If it be nigh hand, sir," with a military salute, "we might carry the gentleman there," suggests the sergeant.

"Those black devils haven't left a plank or a shutter to carry even a baby on," exclaimed Tom.

"We'll do it with the sashes, sir," the hand going to the head again, with mechanical precision.

They form a kind of hammock of their red sashes, and slip it under Louis.

The sergeant is an old soldier; not a chance nor an expedient escapes him. "The gentleman's horse is close by, sir; I hear him making a noise just a while since. He would carry the young lady, case we has to ford the river."

"How the doose do you think we are to catch him?" asked Tom.

Louis's whistle was still hanging to one of

his button-holes; without a word, Stella took it, and imitated, as well as she could, her cousin's call to his horse. Almost before she had ceased, the fine animal came trotting up the road.

"Kaled!" called Stella; but Kaled did not hearken to her; he went up to his master, sniffed at the prostrate body, whinnying pitifully.

"By George, he's a brick," exclaimed Tom, in a transport of admiration, as he seized the bridle. Stella, the most timid of women with horses, put her arm round Kaled's neck, kissed him with a sob, and allowed Tom to lift her on to the man's saddle.

"Hold fast by his mane, and don't jerk his mouth, and you'll do," said Tom.

The officer and soldier raised the wounded man, Louis's eyes opened for a moment, and fell on Stella's face of anguish; he tried to smile—tried to speak.

"Don't speak, cousin Louis, don't; I am not

frightened; - we are going to take you to Dr. McNiel."

He had closed his eyes again, and she doubted whether he had understood her.

The high-blooded Kaled bore his helpless rider down the steep road with a care quite human; she was indeed fearlessly indifferent: in her heart there was only room for one great terror.

Luckily more than a month had elapsed since the rains, and the river had had time to shrink back nearly into its narrowest channel. The road to Dr. McNiel's went through the yard of Miss Portia's golden turreted dwelling; Louis's bearers were dropping with fatigue.

"Suppose we rest here," said Tom, his face like the Red Lion of Brentford.

No clatter of negro tongues, no cackling of poultry, no barking of dogs, greet the party. All is silent as the grave, the jalousies are most of them on the ground, one or two still hang loosely on one hinge, the turrets (Miss Portia's

glory), that the hurricane had spared, have vanished; the white walls are stained and cracked; it is no longer a home, it is a sorrowful, forsaken dwelling; and where was good Aunt Portia herself?

Kaled felt Stella shaking in the saddle, and sidled up to the house to find a prop for his burden.

"We'll take Gautier in here, Stella," says Tom, sweat-drops raining off his brow; "it will be a shelter from the sun, and I'll go on for your doctor."

Louis was carried into what had been Miss Portia's sitting-room; most of the furniture was broken or gone; but Stella, who had slipped down from Kaled's back, found a bedstead, and on it a mattress of maize leaves, and on this Louis was laid.

"Any better, old fellow?" asks Tom, fixing his eye-glass. "I am Tom Hubbard, you know, of the 110th Blanks; don't you remember me?"

"Best go for the docthor sir," said O'Halloran.

“Dr. McNiel does not live far from this,” said Stella; “it’s quite a straight road; and if he is away, do find him, Tom.

Lieutenant Hubbard put his long legs across Kaled and galloped off. The sergeant went out to seek for some water—not only to drink, but to wash away the mask of gunpowder, dirt, and perspiration which covered his face. It is a relief to Stella to be left quiet by the side of the wounded man. How passive he continues. As long as she does not look at him, she can hope; she kneels at the foot of the bed and lays her head on his feet.

That touch has stirred life in Louis: he calls her—

“Stella! Come nearer to me.” She obeyed. “Do not be so afraid, Stella:” he once more closes his eyes.

“I am not afraid, cousin Louis. I am not afraid,” in a would-be firm voice. “I am only a little anxious, very anxious——” the voice

quivered away to nothing. He did not try to speak again; she could be sure by the trembling of his eyelids alone that he was conscious.

Presently Sergeant O'Halloran put in his head and nodded to her, meaning to signify that he saw some one coming. The sharp trot of horses announced the fact directly afterwards.

When Dr. McNiel entered the room where the cousins were, the first words he said, as Stella rose from her knees to meet him, were—"You had better leave us alone, Miss Joddrell."

O'Halloran was leaning against the door-post as she stepped out. He lifted his cap, standing bareheaded and in the act to speak, but she took no notice of him at first, walking up and down restlessly before the window of the room where lay Louis. She was listening for any sound of pain: then all at once she asked—

"Where is Mr. Hubbard?"

"The lieutenant is gone on to t'other place,

me lady—Cedar Valley; it ain't brunt at all, me lady."

Then Stella remembered that possibility, but her thoughts wandered away again directly.

"There's a lad comed with the docthor that knows all about it, me lady."

"Who is come, do you say?"

A young negro lad, who had been informing O'Halloran of Stella's dignity as the lady of Cedar Valley, now came sheepishly forward, holding the doctor's mule.

"I cannot listen to you," said Stella, feeling sick and giddy, for the momentary relief given by the doctor's arrival was gone, and fear was again uppermost. "Perhaps they want you," she went on to the sergeant; "go in and see."

O'Halloran put on his cap and obeyed.

"Young missus," began the black boy, "Cedar Valley Rebecca tell me tell young missus that old Missy Gautier and Miss 'Lympia deys all safe in Great House dere."

Stella heard as one hears in the very moment of dropping off into sleep. She is eagerly intent upon something else—on the doctor's voice. It is coming nearer and nearer: now it is at her very ear, but she does not look towards him.

"How is he to be moved?" she inquired, in a thick voice.

"I told the young officer to go to Cedar Valley, and send us plenty of men with a light bedstead with curtains and a mattress," replied Dr. McNiel in a cheerful matter-of-fact voice: he understood very well how to help her to maintain her composure. "These gun-shot wounds," he resumed, "are plaguey things; the ball may take such a devious course; the shot in the leg doesn't signify." Dr. McNiel did not mention the really serious one in the back of the neck. "He has been fired at twice and from behind; but he is young, and not too young, and of temperate habits: so with good nursing

I dare say we shall do very well, in spite of lying in the dew a *leetle* too long."

Stella bowed her head for all answer. Dr. McNiel brought her a little ether and water from his medicine chest.

Presently she says, "You do not think my cousin in danger? You would tell me the truth, wouldn't you?"

"Of course, I am honest in saying I think we shall do very well. I wish the meeting with his mother were over."

"Oh! poor Maman!" and now the long pent-up tears rained down the cheeks flushed to burning red with constrained emotion. "You need not be afraid, Doctor; the Maman is so brave, and never thinks of herself."

"I know she is all excellence; if any one might have hoped for immunity from their slaves, it ought to have been Mrs. Gautier and Miss Lowe."

"What has become of Aunt Portia, doctor?"

"She is one of the refugees at Cedar Valley, Miss

Joddrell ; not a negro stirred on your property ; that half-crazed girl Rebecca frightened them into keeping quiet. She declared she saw your poor father in his flannel dressing-gown, with the two babies in his arms, flying from one end of the plantation to the other."

"How very dreadful, Doctor !"

"Not so dreadful as what has been actually enacting elsewhere. More than fifty properties were blazing at midnight, and there's been cruelties and bloodshed on both sides. Colonel Bagshot on his return from the inquest got a warning, probably from Rebecca, and sent at once to the commander-in-chief for assistance, but what could a handful of soldiers do against thousands. Your overseer, Mr. Boggis, was out with the militia and is wounded ; and there's a report of a white man lying dead near the Silver Hill negro houses ; not a black will touch the body, and the whites have too much on their hands in watching the living to look after the dead."

Stella shuddered. "Those wretches who fired at my cousin made sure, I dare say, that they had killed him also."

"Ah! Miss Joddrell, when we are judging these blacks, let us remember that we cannot escape from the pitiless logic of cause and effect. Those who sow the whirlwind will reap the tempest—they and their children's children. All our actions, political or private, show by their results, Miss Stella, whether there be any taint at their root."

Stella hung her head at this rebuke, and Dr. McNiel adding, "Live and let live, is both safe policy and sound morality," went back to his patient.

As soon as it was possible to expect it, a score of Cedar Valley negroes appeared with the bedstead and mattress: Tom Hubbard had gone forward to order. Miss Portia's splendid new sedan, now sadly battered, and its bright colours dimmed and soiled, was sent for Stella's use.

How tenderly those blacks carried Mr. Gautier along the rough path, hewn through rocks ! they did not pick their way : many a stone bruised, many a thorn pricked their naked feet : not one even so much as winced for fear of shaking their helpless burden. Yet these very negroes had with difficulty refrained from joining the rebellious crews of the night before !

The West Indian black, with his apathetic intelligence and keen sensations, receives every external impression with avidity. Easily inflamed, easily terrified, easily subjugated, even with few humanizing influences, he nevertheless shows himself more gentle and affectionate, and perhaps less cruel in his fury, than any belonging to other races.

The faces of Mr. Gautier's bearers were puckered into that peculiar pouting grimace which with negroes betokens sorrow and compassion.

It was well on towards noon, the intense light

of the sun making the sky look white, when the mournful cavalcade turned the garden of Cedar Valley Great House.

In the porch stood Mrs. Gautier, a *mater dolorosa*, indeed: the wounded man was her only son, and she was a widow.

Louis was carried into the largest bedroom; the mother, the doctor, and the absolutely necessary attendants alone passed in with them.

As the door closed on Louis, Stella shivered all over; she put out her hands to steady herself, for she felt the earth whirling round with her. Luckily, Tom Hubbard was close enough to catch hold of her.

"I 'bieve the young lady be a dying for hunger," said O'Halloran, who felt himself starving.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONFLICT.

Is it necessary formally to state that Stella did not sail in the *Vectis*?

Olympia had had the courage to remind that pale, troubled creature, wandering to and fro in the house and out of it—standing beneath the window of the room where lay Louis to catch at every sound, and then at the slightest moan of pain, rushing wildly into the plantation—Olympia had had the courage to remind her that her passage was taken, and to ask if she had given up her intention of returning to England.

For a long period Dr. McNiel rides daily through the avenue of trees, from which Stella's inheritance is named. Yet, in all his visits to

the Great House, the Doctor had never seen the young lady, its mistress, since the morning he and she had brought Mr. Gautier thither.

Madame Olympia had been the only one of the three ladies at Cedar Valley who had performed the honours of the house to him. To her he had spoken out all the doubts and fears his mind harboured, and that he carefully hid from the piteous-looking mother. Madame Olympia knew that Gautier might not live ; and that if life itself were spared, his health would never be restored.

“ He is unconscious,” confided the doctor, “ that he has had a stroke of paralysis—very slight, it is true, but a sad fact. What a contradiction it is to try so desperately to preserve a man’s life, when the result must be pain and poverty.”

Stella had no courage to be present at the long conversations which were held between Olympia and Dr. McNiel ; for, after his first visit, she had been driven almost frantic by Olympia’s explana-

tions of the doctor's reasons for and against Louis's recovery. Once had been enough; Stella preferred housekeeper Manie's statements, given with sighs and groans, to the doctor's professional cheerfulness or professional gloom. Besides, she did not like Dr. McNiel: she had long since discovered a want of cordiality in his manner to Mr. Gautier.

One day as the doctor was jogging quietly along on his favourite mule, it started violently, and nearly pitched the Jamaica Esculapius over its head. A tall, thin, white-clothed figure stood in the path.

"Soh, soh, Poll! Ah, Miss Joddrell! no wonder poor Polly's eyes were dazzled; there's a saying that the best of mules is sure to play a shabby trick once in its life. You have heard of the man who rode the same mule for twenty years without an accident. In gratitude he had its skeleton hung up in his dining-hall, and one day down it fell and crushed him. It doesn't do to despise old sayings."

Stella had been waiting for the doctor far out of sight of the windows of the house. Day after day she had seen him come and go, with a sickening heart, and every night the Maman had kissed and blessed her, but not till the last evening had she heard one hopeful word of Louis's state; then the Maman said, "He is much easier."

This was how it was that Stella took courage to waylay the doctor, but far from Olympia's keen ears and eyes.

With a poor attempt to smile at his story, Stella abruptly asked the same question she had put on the morning at Miss Portia's desolate house—

"Will he recover now?"

"Indeed, and I believe he will," answered Dr. McNiel; "indeed, I may venture to say he is out of danger; a little lameness and debility, perhaps, but his life is safe."

"Thank you," said Stella, and left him.

The doctor went along with something addi-

tional to ponder on; he thinks a good deal about the family at Cedar Valley.

Stella took her way to the river side, where she had sat with Louis the morning of the obi, the morning which had seen the first act of the Cedar Valley tragedy.

Very often Stella has sought this same spot—has stayed there for hours, tossing into the bubbling water the leaves and blossoms growing within her reach, her business apparently to watch with half-closed eyes their eddying movements. She was not thinking of them, however, though they were so lovely and sweet, though among them were those “Larksheels which in the middle of carnations and gillyflowers make a delicate tussiemussie, or nosegay, both for scent and smell.” *

Infinite combinations of the same thoughts and memories occupied her, just as from the same colours of the weeds she played with, she might

* Parkinson's “Paradise.”

have painted the countless variety of tints in nature.

It was there she again heard cousin Louis's voice as she had heard it at the gray rock, on the terrace, on the only occasions when they had spoken one to the other out of the fulness of their hearts. There had been more of discord than of harmony between them, more of struggle than of peace; yet the echo of those dialogues had an ineffable charm for Stella.

She is thinking now, for the first time since the 22nd of December, of the future.

Louis out of danger—Louis going to resume his place in the family. What have been his feelings on hearing that Olympia is a widow?—for it is so indeed.

Mr. Smythe, or Smith, was found dead on the road leading up to Silver Hill. His hand still lay on a double-barrelled gun by his side, and both barrels bore traces of having been lately discharged.

The body showed no marks of violence. Upon careful investigation it was proved that the cause of death had not been external. The slender thread of a worn life had been snapped suddenly by the emotions of that fearful night.

The stranger was decently interred in the church-yard of Mr. Eff's little church. The only mourner, Tom Hubbard, who observed "that apparently he had come to Jamaica just in the nick of time to make himself generally useful and agreeable."

"Why not four-and-twenty hours sooner?" had questioned Olympia's troubled mind, when she was told of the occurrence. Why not? because retribution is a sleuth-hound that never loses scent of our mistakes, our errors, our crimes, and comes up to us just as we think ourselves safest, and drags us to the ground.

In those long interviews between Dr. McNiel and Olympia, remarked on by Stella, the Doctor had made known a suspicion that weighed on

his mind. He had compared the bullets extracted from Mr. Gautier's wound with some found in Mr. Smythe's pocket: they were exactly similar.

"Had Mr. Gautier ever mentioned how he received his wounds?" asked the agitated Olympia.

"No more allusion than this:—He had reached the half-way tree, when he met an overseer riding for bare life to Kingston, who called to him that the negroes were setting fire to all the properties, and killing every white. He had galloped back, was shot close to Silver Hill, and he believed he owed his life only to Kaled's swiftness and courage."

Madame Olympia entreated Dr. McNiel to keep his suspicions a secret. She alluded to her present situation, painful enough, but which would become intolerable were it even surmised that she had been the cause which nerved her husband's hand to take Mr. Gautier's life. She could never face Mrs. Gautier again, nor Stella,

on whom she was now entirely dependent, and who was not too well inclined towards Madame Olympia. Everybody knows how fast and far confidence goes when there is any secret between two persons. Madame Olympia did not tell the Doctor that she had done her best by unkind innuendo and hypocritical advice to force Stella to sail in the *Vectis*, and that words had passed between them on that occasion which women rarely forgive—and never forget.

It was one morning early in May that Mrs. Gautier said to Stella, “You will see Louis this afternoon.”

Unseen herself, Stella watched her cousin being assisted into the large dining-hall. She tried to get a glimpse of his face, but in vain; she will go round by the porch, and then she can wear her large hat; she cannot help shrinking from the interview. Another five minutes and she is by the invalid's side. He is lying on the large

sofa drawn across the east window; the couch has been placed there, because the light falls softened through a screen of trees.

Louis held out his hand to Stella as soon as he caught sight of her figure, turning his wan face eagerly to hers.

She clasped his hand firmly, but she could not look at him.

"I am so glad, cousin Louis——" her heart leapt up and cut short her words.

"You look well and happy," he said, with an expression of surprise, and disappointed surprise, in his eyes at the glorious beauty before him. The bright colour emotion had called into her cheeks made her quite unlike the pale, drooping girl he had pictured to himself. Would not cousin Louis's danger banish the roses from cousin Stella's cheeks and lips, and deaden the lustre of her eyes? However, it takes a long time ere sorrow prints indelible marks on a young face; but had Louis glanced at Stella a

quarter of an hour later, he would have thought her pale enough.

How quickly her ear discerned in the tone of Louis's voice something amiss.

She gazed at him then, and the purple light faded from her countenance. On his brow the shadow of death still lingered; his coal-black hair was lavishly besprinkled with grey; his fine active form shrunken and helpless.

"Dearer, dearer, far dearer thus," was the wild cry of her soul, repressed on her trembling lips.

Louis had dropped her hand, laid back his head on the pillow, and closed his eyes. She could trace every vein in their large lids, and she stood there gathering into her heart of hearts, every sign of his suffering—the sunken temples, the cheek tight to the bone, the colourless lips.

Louis was not cured. Dr. McNiel was trifling with them all. Reader, have you ever trembled for a life dearer than your own—ever

contemplated the sharp outlines of beloved features, the eyes drawn backwards into the sockets; and, gazing on the transparent skin of face and hands, been able quite to believe the man of science who assures you that all danger is past? Have not cold moistures broken out on your brow, and unbidden, unbanishable fears chilled the marrow of your bones, and driven sleep from your nights and tranquillity from your days?

Stella had no room in her mind for conjectures as to the impression she had made on Louis. She was far from any idea that the glow, which happiness at again seeing him had spread over her, had jarred his sensitive nature.

Mrs. Gautier sat on one of the high, old-fashioned chairs that were ranged against the wall. In the air of her whole person, though she was busy knitting, there was that peculiar shade of unsettledness one remarks in travellers stopping at an inn, even when they engage in

one of their usual home occupations. The Ma-man's very seat, taken at random, near neither to table nor window, nor yet isolated enough to afford room for gathering round her either work-basket or books, was characteristic of one who feels herself a passenger.

Aunt Portia was shut up in her sedan chair, seeing visions or sleeping, at all events retired from public view.

Stella would have given worlds to know how Louis and Olympia had met. //

Within reach of Mr. Gautier's sofa was the widow Smith or Smythe, in black bombazeen, but without weeds, reading an English newspaper: her brow as smooth, as serene, as that of a happy, sleeping infant.

Dr. McNiel's entrance broke the palpable silence. He felt his patient's pulse, then began retailing the news of the day. The island was relieved from martial law, the West Indian mercantile body had presented the Colonial Secretary

with a protest against the Orders in Council of 1831, those orders which the people of Jamaica accused of having caused the late insurrection. The Ministers had agreed to grant a committee for inquiry; and in the meantime the orders were actually suspended.

"There is only one reasonable thing to do now," said Louis.

"And that is?" asked the Doctor.

"To grant immediate emancipation, Doctor. The slaves have been forced into thinking for themselves; mere ameliorations in the condition of the negroes will not answer any longer. Either the severest restrictions, Doctor, or full and entire liberty; half a dozen more years of half measures and Jamaica is ruined."

How strange to hear Louis's voice in calm discussion. To Stella it was as though she were dreaming.

"It's well the folks down yonder do not hear you," replied Dr. McNiel. "They are mad

on the question. Treason, Rebellion, America, St. Domingo, anything rather than Emancipation."

"There is no moral unity among us," replied Louis, "so we are sure of coming off losers. For years I have seen the worse than uselessness of endeavouring to compromise matters between immediate material interest and conscience. It is like milking a he-goat into a sieve—nothing remaining of nothing. I shall try and play well the only part for which I am now fit, that of a wearied spectator of the fulfilment of our general ruin."

The Doctor was one of those persons who like to lay aside a subject on which there may be a difference of opinion. So without answering, he turned his professional gaze on the ladies, and startled every one present by exclaiming,—

"Miss Joddrell, I must take you in hand: what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I am quite well, I assure you," said Stella, shortly.

“What!” he had hold of her wrist. “Well? with your pulse in a racing gallop! if you contradict me again, I’ll order you to England by next packet.”

Stella laughed. “Indeed, Doctor, there is nothing the matter with me. I have been out too long in the sun perhaps.”

“You had better lay some embargo on Stella’s long walks and rides,” observed Olympia. “She is sometimes out nearly the whole day.”

“Ride! exclaimed Louis; “that is a new habit, is it not? Do you venture out alone?”

Before Stella could vouch that her only rides were on Sunday to church, the Doctor, as if there was some affinity in his mind between Miss Joddrell’s rides and the tall Lieutenant, said—

“By-the-by, I have not met Mr. Hubbard here for some time.”

“He scarcely ever comes; but after the arrival of letters and newspapers from England,” said

the Maman. "The young gentleman has been full of thoughtful attention for you, my son," she added, turning towards Mr. Gautier.

"Very tall young man, that," observed the Doctor to Louis.

"Very."

"Not so tall as a man I once saw," cried Miss Portia, putting her head forth from her sedan. "Miss Joddrell, will you remind me to measure the top of Mr. Hubbard's thumb the next time he pays us a visit. The man I mean had a thumb with a top exactly the size of a crown piece."

For months after this, life at Cedar Valley moved with a desperate regularity. At the same hour, the noon of each day, Louis was helped to his sofa; at the same hour, that of sunset, he retired to his own room. He passed the intermediate time on the large couch, surrounded by, nay, nearly covered with newspapers—his great interest in life seemed to be newspapers—and

Stella's first exercise of power as mistress of the house was to gratify this taste of cousin Louis. Tom Hubbard, instigated by her, sent up the newspapers and magazines received by his regiment, and every island paper was regularly to be found day after day on the reading table, placed conveniently within Mr. Gautier's reach.

Louis never refused to converse, though he seldom took the initiative. It was perfectly evident that he wished to avoid all discussions of the catastrophe at Silver Hill; it would have seemed, indeed, from what he had said to Dr. McNiel, that he considered his game of life played out; he was like one without hope or fear.

The object of general care and attention, he was gentle and complying, the only proof he could give of grateful feeling, and heaven knows what it must have cost him, a man once so independent in every personal habit, to be waited on as if he were a helpless infant. For at times he was so, when certain states of the atmo-

sphere produced paroxysms of rheumatic agony. The hours he had passed lying an inert mass exposed to a heavy dew, had added this trial to the effects of his wounds.

Olympia was a fixture in the general sitting-room. Louis never repulsed her attentions, but he never called on her for assistance. The person whose attendance he preferred was clearly the negress Manie, the housekeeper at Cedar Valley for the third generation of Joddrells.

Appearances were tranquil within the Great House; but there was more than an absence of all cordiality, there was isolation of feeling as well as cold formality among the indwellers, that removed them only a very few degrees from a community of Trappists.

It was not, however, only the dulness of a certain fixed routine, it was rather to be compared to the lull which, whether in external nature or in the inner life of man, interrupts for a short time a tempest.

For a while Stella lived in nervous dread of her cousin expressing that wish, which flutters when it does not actually terrify—for lives there the human being, even with the clearest conscience, who hears with equanimity those words, "I wish to speak to you?" Will any one who may be so obliging as to read these pages think the matter over for a minute, he will instantly understand all that is not written down in fear of too lengthy a digression.

But as one day was quietly added to the other, and the words were not spoken, Stella, who had hitherto continued the habit of long walks, with which Olympia had accounted for her ill looks, began to remain in the sitting-room for hours, excessively occupied with her crochet-work. Amazing, indeed, what she accomplished in that way at this period. The first painful beating of her heart just alluded to had been followed by a hazy, dreamy pleasure. Once more it is better only to note this sensation, and to trust

to its being understood, both in its cause and effect. A similar experience, however, alone can make it comprehensible.

Miss Portia and her sedan had been always fixtures in that long un-homeish room. The old woman was too inquisitive to leave the family gathering, although the irritating crackling of Louis Gautier's newspapers had over and over again nearly given her an attack of her worst blues. The first time Aunt Portia missed the rustle of her foes, she looked out of her sedan to make sure that the invalid was present. Yes, there he was, and with a newspaper in his hand, and Miss Stella working at one of the windows. When those little quick explosions of dry paper began again, the old head again was protruded: Miss Stella was absent. Miss Portia continued her observations, even with the aid of a pocket spy-glass, through which her prophetic sight discerned signs of an inevitable conflict. It commenced thus—

Olympia began to make Stella suffer from her old inconsistencies of manner. The widow's ways were worth studying. Now unduly exalting Stella, forcing her to take the lead though Mrs. Gantier was there, referring to her decision and wishes, treating her as a queen surrounded by courtiers—the most ungraceful position for a young girl; then, at other moments, pitilessly overshadowing her in any attempt to join in the general conversation, speaking at one and the same instant as though she neither heard nor saw Stella. These were the sole occasions on which Mr. Gantier exerted himself. He would interrupt Olympia by observing, “Stella is speaking. What were you saying, Stella?”

As soon as he had checked Olympia's intolerance, Louis would take up his newspaper again, and decidedly avoid encountering Stella's glance. In those moments Olympia's eyes would be full of a fierce, uncontrollable hatred, as they settled first on one cousin and then the other.

But nothing could be more unsettled than Olympia's temper ; a true testimony to the heaviness of her heart. More clouds are gathering on Stella's sky.

It is not to be supposed that no attentions from without the family circle were paid to Mr. Jodrell's heiress. On the contrary, invitations and offers of service literally poured in upon her. Besides being the wealthiest girl in Jamaica she was a beauty, and the heroine of strange, romantic stories.

But not only did kindness take cognizance of the heiress of Cedar Valley, malevolence was also at work. Pretty Auntie was not alone in thinking that Stella was in a wrong position.

Mr. Gautier and her son were not spared ; they were denounced as self-seeking, self-interested — determined to take advantage of the dear girl's orphan condition. The monotony of Stella's days was broken by a paper assault. Reports travelled to England and came back

again to her, accompanied by rebuke and censure, and all those galling insinuations a female pen can so politely and affectionately administer.

“If I were not so deeply interested in you, my dear girl, I would not mention the subject. Believe me, I tell you what no one else ventures to say to you, but what is said in plain terms behind your back.” But the worst of all to bear were covert insinuations about Louis and the widow. “She would find some day how completely she had been made a fool of. She did not see that she was used as a screen,” &c. &c.

Hitherto Stella had accepted life as a child accepts it. That was no longer possible. By that cruel paper war, she learned the weighty part that public opinion plays in the happiness or peace of our lives.

This new, unknown power made her tremble—for she knew not how to combat it; she did not scruple to express the indignation that

fired her; she wrote a distinct explanation of her situation to her aunt. Ending with these words, "that no enemies could have shown themselves more barbarous, more unjust than her friends." Nothing she dreaded more than letters from England.

More than once she had asked herself, if there were really any wrong in her remaining at Cedar Valley with the Maman and her cousin.

"Because he is dearer to me than anyone else in the world, is that the reason why I should propose to leave him. Where is the wrong? I cannot see it. If there be any, cousin Louis will bid me go and I will obey; not till then, though all the world write me horrible letters."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONFLICT.

THE heavy autumnal rains were come and gone. Steel gray clouds were flying low over the sky; it looked indeed as if another shower were at hand, when suddenly a broad blue expanse appeared overhead, with a bordering of rosy, pillowy clouds. The change was magical: the twittering of birds, the hum of insects, the sound of human voices—of human labour, the wholesome smell of the refreshed earth filled the air, lately so mournful with the unceasing drip and steam of heavy rain-drops.

Even Miss Portia was wooed by the returning brightness and warmth to creep out of her sedan, to look at reviving nature.

Louis and Olympia were in the dining-hall. They had never been left alone, by some accident, for five consecutive minutes, since they had both been inmates of the Great House of Cedar Valley. Olympia's colour came and went rapidly, her bosom heaved: she was hot and cold: she was about to throw her last throw.

What a change from those days when these two persons' thoughts were exchanged freely. They still continued to say "Gautier" and "Olympia," but the familiarity of the appellations was frozen away by the tone in which either spoke to the other.

"Louis Gantier!" exclaimed Olympia, at length.

At once he laid aside his newspaper, and waited that she should continue her speech, his look dwelling calmly on her face. She was daunted, and tears of mortification sprung to her eyes. He immediately resumed his reading.

Olympia tried to find words to put her case

before him, but in vain ; there was none of that enthusiasm of feeling left in her, which, torrent-like, overbears all obstacles to its free expression.

Olympia, as Nena Perez, had begun life with the ardent desire of achieving a certain social position. She set herself diligently to attain this end, thanking Providence for having made her devoid of very lively sympathies—calm, passionless. Olympia, like many others, mistook want of development for want of passion ; nevertheless she was so far right in her estimate of herself, for her nature was not one of those created for, nor delighting in self-devotion. She was capable of an act of devotedness, but that is not a proof of the capability of a profound, unmixed affection. All violent persons give occasional examples of magnanimity : the sort of heroism with which brigands and assassins astonish the world.

In the long interval of separation that had

lately occurred between her and Mr. Gautier, Olympia had had time for reflection on the past, and for consideration of the future. Dwelling on all she had been, as companion, friend, and disinterested aid, to Louis, she deepened the colours of the picture she drew of herself, involuntarily, as people do when they have any interest in doing so; washing away the brighter tints from Gautier's kindness to herself. A transformation of her sentiments towards him had indeed commenced from the night on which she had betrayed her jealousy of Stella. She could not forgive him the struggle it had cost him to decide in favour of friendship. The tie they had both believed everlasting was undermined from that hour. It is as old as the hills, but as true also, the saying that Friendship will not last where the dignity of virtue does not preside.

Olympia in loving, loved herself, her interests, her comfort, her own pleasure. As we love the source of joy, so we are apt to dislike that of

pain; no wonder then that she wearied of her situation, that she felt that any result was preferable to that of a slow petrification. She was irritated by the calm benevolence with which she was treated, by the sense of her dependence on Stella. She must act; any action would and should alter her position. It was expediency, born of stubborn resolve, which prompted this appeal to Louis Gautier.

“Why are you so changed, so coldly unkind?” as she asked these questions her hand was placed on his shoulder.

“The smart of a wound constantly reminds one of the hand that inflicted it,” he replied.

“A wound! I don’t understand; how could I have wounded you?” she said, in an excited manner.

“I am sorry you need to ask,” answered Louis, with grave sadness. “You wounded me when you forswore truth, family ties, and all womanly delicacy. When you suffered the motherless

daughter of your own sister to receive loverlike attentions from the man you were aware was your husband, wilfully hiding the fact from me. We were to have no secrets from one another, you remember. No thanks to you if that innocent girl has not been tortured in order to provide the amusement of an idle hour. Olympia, have you, indeed, no conception of the pang it gives me to know that all I admired and valued in you was a sham and a lie!"

"A man should feel himself very clear of conscience who flings such heavy stones at another."

"My conscience clear!" Gautier smiled, bitterly; "but I am not guilty towards you, Olympia,—not guilty towards you!"

"Guilty to whom, then?" she asked, with an impossibility of restraining herself. "You are dumb? Guilty, I suppose, of not opening your arms to receive Miss Joddrell when she was ready to fling herself into them."



“Hush—hush! remember whose roof shelters you.”

“Thank you for reminding me of the proper demeanour and sentiments of a dependant. Don’t excuse yourself; I am perfectly aware that it is my own fault if I am so—that I ought to have refused your and your mother’s kind offer. I ought to have known that one is never long indispensable to any one. It was an experience that my age warranted my having gathered. I blame no one but myself for all that is come and gone. It is never too late to mend, however, and in future I shall follow the good example set me—think only of myself.” Olympia’s arguments in her own favour might have stretched still further had she not glanced at Gautier to see the effect of her words. “Oh! Gautier, forgive me!” she exclaimed, when she saw his head had fallen helplessly back on the pillow.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said: “a man does not die so easily.”

Neither of them had observed that Stella had come to the door just at the moment that Olympia had placed her hand familiarly on Mr. Gautier's shoulder. The pain the poor girl felt was so like the stab of a sharp weapon, that she put her hand up to her bosom as if to find the wound. She did not stay a minute in the house. She ran without stopping to the burial ground; roses bloomed now around her mother's grave.

Anguish and anger rent her between them.

"I wish I could tear this love out of my heart. I wish I could only care for doing good. No; I don't wish to give up loving him. I had rather be unhappy than happy not loving him. Why does she come between us again, with her artful eyes? and he knows her — knows she is not good. It makes me wicked — wicked only to think of her deceiving him again. I don't care to live if I cannot serve him. If I have to go away and leave him all the good in me will go too."

Poor young girl! how fiercely her eyes were gleaming down on the mounds before her—all the life and passion in her to come to a quiet bed in the earth. Some such thoughts struck Stella, perhaps, for she exclaimed aloud—

“Knowing I shall be tranquil enough and feel no pain by and by, doesn’t take the agony away from me now. Why was the world created if no one is happy?”

There was no one near to argue with or soothe her, but placid nature rebuked her. The evening song of birds, the slanting gleam of sunshine across the graves, the gentle waving of the leaves of the trees, the breeze that lifted her hair and cooled her hot brow, reproached her with her violence.

“I am uneasy about Stella,” remarked Mrs. Gautier, one day, suddenly breaking the silence of the hall, and without particularly addressing anyone.

"What do you see amiss about her?" asked Olympia, in a dry tone.

"Whenever I look at her," replied the Maman, "I ask myself, is she going to heaven so soon?"

You might have heard the dropping of a pin, so absolute was the hush in the room.

"Olympia!" called out Louis, presently. His voice made her start violently. She went close to his sofa, and he spoke so that she alone could hear what he said.

"You asked me the other day to whom I had been guilty, and you answered your own question. Yes, I confess it, I have been guilty to Stella. For your sake I strangled my love for her in its birth. Yes; incredible as it may seem to you, I did so, that you might never have your home of so many years made less happy to you. For scarcely had I owned to myself the strength of my feeling for my cousin, than her frankness, poor child, allowed me to see how inimical she was to you. I never thought of *you* as the enemy



of my young love. I believed you more than any other mortal free of earthly taint. Proud of my own justice and strength, I used her cruelly."

"It is not too late to remedy that false step."

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "do you think that I could offer this poor crippled form, never free from pain, to any woman—to a girl rich in health, youth, and beauty. Where have I the sunshine, the gladness, the protecting strength, the bridegroom's offerings to the bride? Look at this," and he held towards her a thin, nerveless hand: he bared his wrist, he made an effort to raise a common-sized book lying on the table by him and failed. "It is fitted, is it not, to pluck a rosebud, and to guard it?"

"Is your illness also to be laid to my charge?" asked Olympia, with a changing colour, and a voice that she tried in vain to keep steady.

"We will leave that subject alone, if you please," said Louis, coldly.

"Then I have nothing further to say to you," returned Olympia. "With your character, one-sided, as Mrs. Dashwood calls it, we should never come to an understanding again. The best thing for us both is to part."

"You are your own mistress," he said. "I had hoped you would have acknowledged the wrong you have done us all, and made our remaining together, or our parting, less bitter."

"Confessions are about as useless things as reproaches. I could never be again in your eyes what I was, though I wore sackcloth and ashes for the rest of my life. I don't choose to accept of mere good-will. All I request is, that you trouble yourself no further about me. Perhaps I am not so black as you paint me:" and she went away queenlike.

Truly the experiences of life are bitter potions; one of the bitterest to swallow is, that friendship can turn to enmity, that the tie we thought binding may be broken by passion or interest.

Neither Louis, nor the Maman, nor Stella ever saw Olympia again after that evening. She shook hands all round as they separated for the night. She hesitated a little when by Mrs. Gautier's side, holding the old lady's hand between both of hers.

"Good-night, Maman," she said, twice over.

The next morning, when Stella went to the stables as usual, one of the stable-boys came and told her that Madame Olympia had gone out for a ride on Kaled, and "young missus no need be uneasy," Madame 'Lympia left word so.

This news annoyed Stella, for she had never allowed Kaled to be mounted since the day he had carried her to Aunt Portia's ruined dwelling. She had learned to go every morning to Kaled's stall, without fear of his hind legs, to feed him with bread and sugar. He, on his part, had learned to know her voice, and to receive her with the whinny of pleasure formerly reserved for his master. Kaled's only discipline was the

being taken out an airing by a groom mounted on another horse ; no saddle was to press his back until Louis could ride him again. Not a very wise provision for the invalid's comfort and safety, but a natural enough resolve in a romantic girl.

Stella had therefore a moment of real anger when she heard that Olympia was riding Kaled, but when second breakfast was served, and neither horse nor lady had returned, annoyance gave place to uneasiness.

"Olympia visits nowhere," said the Maman, in distress. "She must have met with an accident."

Louis became even paler than usual as he remarked : "She rides well." He wished he had spoken less severely yesterday.

"I will send people to the gap" (the meeting of four roads), said Stella. "Some one must have met or heard of her."

"Send to Dr. McNiel's," cried Miss Portia, putting her head out of her sedan.

"Then you know where Olympia is gone, Aunt Portia."

"Yes, Miss Joddrell, I do know!" replied Miss Portia, in her deepest, most prophetic tone.

The old woman wore her former air of triumph.

Ever since she had failed to foresee the events of the insurrection, so personally interesting to herself and her intimates, she had been painfully silent and humble. No inducing her to take any interest in her own concerns. She had refused any interviews with her fat negroes, leaving them in full possession of her property. Reasoning with her was in vain. "I have had enough of the world," said she, "plenty of revolutions — no progress. Virtue! thou art but a name!—sad sentence, but I fear true as sad."

Miss Portia had lost all her occupations at once. Prophetess, Proprietor, Emancipationist, Revolutionist—all gone at once. Nothing left her, but her sedan chair.

As if she were radiant with oracular brevity, she pronounced her order to seek Olympia at Dr. McNiel's: her words relieved every one of her hearers. They guessed her second-sight had the sure foundation of fact.

Before sunset the messenger despatched to the Doctor's brought word back that Madame Olympia had been there, and had left again in company with Dr. McNiel.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Portia, significantly, and letting her eyes travel from one face to the other.

"Can you tell us when she will come back, Aunt Portia?" asked Stella.

"Sleep soundly, Miss Joddrell; Madame Olympia hasn't been as safe as she is this day for many a year past:" and the window of the sedan was inexorably closed.

The next day passed in expectation not the less keen that there was no continual "I wonder" beginning or cutting in two every phrase. News

of the fugitive might be hoped for when the negroes sent to the town for various stores came back in the evening.

Before that, however, Lieutenant Tom Hubbard, on his charger, was seen by those in the large hall, riding by the porch. He dismounted in the yard, and instead of entering the Great House, sent to request Miss Joddrell to come out and speak to him.

As Stella was passing through the door, near which was Aunt Portia's sacred corner, one of the glasses of the sedan was quietly let down, and Aunt Portia looked forth, nodding and chuckling. In a querulous, quavering voice she sung—

"She's o'er the sea with Jock o' Prospect House."

Tom gave his information very concisely.

"Funny, ain't it?" he observed. "I was chief mourner to her first husband, and best man to her second."

Stella could not believe it; would not believe it:—

“What! Olympia married to that red-faced, sandy-haired, bush doctor?”

“By special licence, I assure you,” repeats Tom.

“She scarcely knew him,” says Miss Stella, aghast.

“Ah! but she did though; he’s been in love with her for years. She might have married him before, if she hadn’t been married already, you know,” replies Tom. “He explained it all to me; a long attachment, and all that.”

“He is so rough, and old, and ungainly!”

“Beauty is in the lover’s eye,” says Tom, philosophically.

“Oh! Tom, *don’t* be so tiresome; do tell me the truth.”

“I have told you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The parson asked: ‘Who gives this woman away?’ Then the clerk

nudged me, and whispers, 'Sir, you are to say, I do.' So I called out, 'I do;' and then the doctor said, 'I will;' and the lady made a sort of bow. By jingo, my blood ran cold when the parson sung out, 'For better, for worse.' I say, Stella, one must be terribly far gone not to cut and run when one hears a man laying down the law so strict."

"It is horrible!" observes Stella.

"Well, I feel it just so," returns Tom.

"To think of her being so rash."

"As to that she was right to be quick about it if it was to be done. Nobody could go through with it in cold blood, you know. It's as bad as hearing the articles of war read."

"Oh! Tom, you don't understand. The words are beautiful; it's the act of profaning them that is horrible."

Tom whipped the leaves of the rose bush nearest to him, and remained silent. They were walking in the path running along at the top

of the barbecue, between a hedge of roses and oleanders, and in sight of the large hall. Louis from his sofa could see them as they earnestly talked.

"No; I can-*not* understand it," exclaimed Stella.

"Marriages are made in heaven: that's the way my mother accounts for their being so odd."

Stella gave him a look of disgust. "The law of contradiction perhaps," added Tom, conciliatingly. "I can always wager what the wife's like if I see the husband, and *vice versâ*. Big men always have dumpty wives; and tall women, tiny men. Look at my respected parents; the highest tip of my father's hair but just reaches my mother's shoulder. Beauty marries ugliness; it's meant to be so, in my opinion, else there would be a fine monopoly of looks and size."

"Then what a dumpty you will marry," says

Stella, gravely, bridling her neck so as to look taller than usual.

“There’s exceptions, you know, to every rule,” replied Tom. “But, without joking, it is a serious business that marrying—once done and there you are in a regular fix—upon my soul, you are; and if a fellow marries when he’s a subaltern, why, you know, he must give up his horse.”

“I should advise him to be satisfied with the horse; he can change *that* when he likes.”

“Yes; and in this blessed climate, a horse is a horse. But a pretty, tidy girl to be kind to one when one’s no end tired with parade, would be nice enough too! Forbes of ours looks downright jolly when his little lady is waiting on him, and petting him, you can’t think how. I say, Stella, ain’t you rather sick of staying up here among niggers and old fogies.”

Stella opened her eyes to their greatest stretch on Tom, and some sort of glance shot from them

that reduced the Lieutenant to whipping the rose-bushes again.

"Where is Dr. McNiel?" she asked. "Did Olympia send no letter—not even a message?"

"She wasn't very affable, I can assure you. The Doctor told me, he had come in for his brother's estate in Scotland—Cataract something or other,—and he was retiring to the paternal house, and didn't need to be doctoring any more."

Stella thought for a little: then she said, "You had better go in and tell the news to the Maman and my cousin. I'll follow you presently."

"I can't. I shan't know what to say—they are such odd people. I never can get on with them a bit."

"But you must," said Stella, in the tone with which she had always governed him in their school-room days. She had regularly tyrannised over him then. She continued: "You were a

witness of the ceremony, and naturally Mrs. Gautier would like to hear the particulars from you. Just say what you have said to me."

"Catch me; it's nothing talking to you: I can tell you anything, you know; but Gautier listens somehow in a way, you know, which puts a man decidedly out."

"Oh! now *do*, Tom. I shall be *so* much obliged to you."

"Well! then, of course, I must; but I say, Stella, don't leave me too long alone with them. You come in when you think I have had time to do it."

"Very well, I will; but now go."

Tom Hubbard marched up the long hall with a valiant air, eye-glass fixed; cleared his throat, and premised—

"I have something very particular to say to you, Mr. Gautier—something, perhaps, that will astonish you. I'm not sure how you'll like it; perhaps you can guess."

At this crisis of Tom's peroration, Mr. Gautier's pale face flushed a little, and he said in a dry, cold voice:—"I am not a good guesser; but I think I can assure you, Mr. Hubbard, that your news will not annoy me."

"Oh! very well; then it's all right you know," replied Tom, with great alacrity. "At any rate, you know it wasn't my fault; I only did what I was asked."

Mr. Gautier opened his eyes as wide as Stella had done.

"Pray, explain yourself, Mr. Hubbard."

"Stella says, I must tell, because I acted father, you see, to Madame Olympia Smith when she was married, last evening, by special licence to Dr. McNiel."

Louis Gautier nearly sprang off the sofa.

"Married!" he exclaimed.

"'Pon my soul she is, that is, according to the English Church. They are to be married over again in the Roman Catholic way, when they

get to England. They hadn't time here, for they had to go on board ship last night. You know, of course, it wasn't for me to bother them with questions—they were old enough to take care of themselves. Dr. McNiel wrote to ask me to the marriage, because he said your mother and Miss Joddrell would like to know it was all right."

Tom's tongue was loose enough now; he met with no interruption from his auditors, for Mrs. Gautier had come to his side, and so had Miss Portia, with her man's hat on her head, and one hand protecting her left ear, the right being of itself sufficient to hear with.

"You have heard the news, Miss Stella?" called out Aunt Portia, as the young lady came in with a very shy face.

"Yes, Aunt Portia;" and Stella did not mean to be curious, but she was. Her glance at Louis met his at her.

Tom Hubbard was invited to stay over the

night, and really for once felt himself quite at ease with the family party at Cedar Valley. The fact was everyone was thankful to talk to him, and encourage him to talk. Excepting to Aunt Portia, the subject of Olympia's marriage was one touching on too many feelings not to be dangerous and painful. It was an unspeakable relief to be told of the worries of drill, and the miseries of dining in a stock, and buttoned to the chin with the thermometer at 100 degrees ; to hear how many spaniels the Colonel's wife cherished, and how few girls would venture to waltz with Tom.

" They can't get up at me, and I can't get down at them, you understand."

Mr. Gautier smiled, and Stella laughed outright; but Tom was not observant enough to detect the embarrassment and nervousness of either the one or the other.

The next morning, Stella was up to give Tom his coffee before he left Cedar Valley.

“Don’t you be in a rage with me, Stella, for what I am going to say,” began Tom.

“If it is anything disagreeable, why say it, Tom?”

“Somehow, I think it’s my dooty, and a man’s bound not to shirk that, and you are almost like one of my sisters. I’d think I ought to speak to Emily if she were in your place. You see, girls want brothers to tell them what’s right and what’s wrong.”

“Then tell me,” said Stella, stiffening herself, her cheeks hot as fire, and her eyes fixed on the floor.

“Well, they say ——”

“I will not listen to any ‘they say,’” interrupted Stella: “it’s always the preface to a meanness or a calumny. I am ready to hear and reply to whatever you please to remark, or any of your friends; but put a name, I beg, before your observations.”

“I knew you would be angry,” said Tom,

rather pathetically : "however, it *is* my dooty. My mother writes me letters, and says Mrs. Dashwood is grieved, and all that, about your remaining here, and that you ain't in a proper position ; and my mother says, that as you won't listen to the advice of your friends, I ought to tell Mr. Gautier how much they disapprove of his conduct, in taking advantage of your youth."

"If you ever dare to say a word of the kind to my cousin," says Stella, almost in a whisper but with eyes flashing like lightning at him, "I'll—I'll—never speak to you again—I'll kill myself—I won't bear the shame—he shall not be insulted."

"But, you know, you can't go on for ever so, and people in Kingston expect——"

"I will not hear what people expect. You have done what you think your duty, and I am not angry with you: but, Tom," here Stella visibly softened, "the Maman is old, and grows

more and more feeble every day; my cousin is a terrible invalid: they are my near relations, they need me—no one else in the world does. As long as my aunt lives,—she is my aunt, for you know she is grandmamma's sister—surely she is sufficient protection for me.”

“You see it's all that business of Madame Olympia's that got the Gautiers talked about,” persisted Tom.

“Ah! because the Maman and Louis were better and kinder than other people, Tom, that is the reason they are abused.”

“You see when people don't understand, don't see the reason for kindness, they always suppose something wrong. It's the way of the world, Stella, and you can't change it.”

“What need one care, if one is sure of being right?”

“It ain't pleasant to have people shaking their heads and wagging their tongues for everlasting about one; and, Stella, you don't look as you

used to do: no, you don't: you have always a tired look now."

"I am no longer a child."

"Well, now, do you just think over what my old mammy says. She really does care for you in her way, you know; we all do; and don't you go for to sacrifice yourself out and out. It isn't right for you to be moped up here; I wonder Gautier lets you."

"He took my passage for England—you know he did—and all the family know he did—and they know that the insurrection alone prevented my going away. How is my cousin to turn me out of my own house?"

"I'm sure I don't see how every one is to be satisfied, only if you'd just give yourself a chance, even in Kingston——. Well, now, there, I am done. You write home and give the folks there your reasons, will you?"

They shook hands. Tom went his way, rather depressed in spirits for him.

Stella, while she appeared to be listening to a long harangue from housekeeper Manie, was saying to herself—

“What may I not expect, when Tom Hubbard has taken to lecturing me?”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TREATY OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE.

It was Stella's twenty-first birthday. Her first thought when she awoke was, "Louis ceases to be my guardian; now he need never have anything more to do with me, unless he pleases. I wonder whether he will say anything to me about it to-day, or if he will wait till to-morrow."

Through Mr. Boggis, a petition had been made for a holiday, "in honor of young missus' birthday." Not a hand on the plantation but knew even at what hour of the day or night young missus was born. The petition was graciously granted, on condition that there was no dancing or rejoicing near the Great House. But Stella had forgotten the certainty of birthday presents

from the negroes. Such bunches of plantains and bananas, baskets of oranges, carved calabashes, long-legged fowls, and dozens of eggs; there was even a very small pig; then there were the courtesies, bows, and shaking of hands. The "Garamighty bless you, and your posterity!" equalled the gifts.

Stella at last satisfies her well-wishers: the house-servants remove the provisions, and she retires into the little drawing-room, which has been tacitly given up entirely to her use. There she has her desk, and keeps a strict account of the house expenses, and makes a memorandum of all that is ordered from the stores in Kingston: there, she gives her private audiences to Mr. Eff, the clergyman, about the children's school she has established; to Mr. Boggis, who has never recovered his red complexion since the 22nd of December; and to any negro who claims to be heard.

In the little drawing-room she looks, quite

unconsciously, the stately young châtelaine; in the long hall, she is again quite a girl.

Her birthday was in the last week of November, and Manie has been giving her a verbal list of articles to be ordered in readiness for Christmas. Instead of writing them down on the long, neatly folded paper before her, Stella sat with the feathered end of her pen resting against her lips, lost in meditation.

“Unless he pleases, he need now have nothing more to do with me:” her brave heart flinches; if there is to be such a wrench, it will tear up the roots of her life. Her girlish hero-worship for Mr. Gautier has deepened into a faithful love, her heart has grown to him. And now that she has watched the strong man struck down in the prime of his manhood to the helplessness of a little child—has watched him for months, oh! yes, for months, patient of pain, enduring this helplessness, worse than pain, without lamentation or struggle,—could she help loving him

more and more? And love him she did, with all her heart, and soul, and strength, far more than in the days when he shone superior in looks to all the men she had ever seen. There is something sublime in quiet suffering,—a something that touches our hearts more deeply than beauty, or talent, or fame, or even the impetuosity of a violent passion.

Stella did wake up occasionally to the recollection of Manie's list: but the thought of the impending interview, which could not but take place, always sent the amounts of rice and sugar out of her head.

A dark shadow came between her and the light, she looked up.

"Cousin Louis!"

"I have come to wish you many happy returns of the day. Can you leave your writing, and go with me to the seat under the mango-tree?"

"Oh, yes!" with immense inner trepidation.

Mr. Gautier had walked from his own room to the little drawing-room, only a few yards, with the help of his stick alone.

“Will you take my arm, cousin Louis?”

He accepted the offer, the first time he had leant on her. Poor Stella! no doubt he felt the hurry of your pulse.

“This is the pleasantest season of the Jamaica year,” he began, when they were seated in the very spot where he had seen her in the hammock, with Johnnie pelting her with pomegranate blossoms; he went on: “No temperature in England exactly answers to this one; there it is generally too hot or too cold—sharp, biting winds and scorching suns. Do you remember once standing out in the March wind, to bring me my letters?”

“Yes,” answered Stella.

“I can see you now as you were then;” Louis closed his eyes for an instant. “Let me judge if you are much changed since that.” He gazed

at her, did not sigh, gave no indication of emotion, save that twitch, now so habitual that it could scarce be deemed as proving any peculiar agitation at this moment. "You are thinner, perhaps, but, thank God!" with sudden energy, "you are all that He meant you to be; capable of happiness and of giving happiness, good, kind, and innocent as you were five years ago. You cannot fathom, Stella, the comfort this conviction is to me."

Here came a pause.

Actuated by a strong desire to keep up the conversation, Stella affirmed—

"You are much better, cousin Louis."

"I am as well as I shall ever be. I am a cripple for life."

"Dr. McNiel said you would recover."

"Did he? He must have been bribed to say so," returned Louis, with one of his rare smiles. "Not all the College of Surgeons could put hampty-dumpty to rights again, my good cousin.

Apart from the possibility of becoming a little stronger, I am as I shall be."

The conversation proceeded by leaps from one subject to another.

"This year I did not forget the day of your birth. Did you think I should?"

"No," said Stella, faintly.

"My guardianship ceases; a very nominal one it has been. Instead of good, I have brought sorrow to your house. Once, you recollect, Stella, I wished you to return to England; perhaps you have wondered why I have never urged it on you again, since I have been well enough to do so?"

Stella's eyes now did turn anxiously on her cousin.

"We are very apt to deceive ourselves," he began—then stopped. "I mean to say that, considering you were so nearly of age, I made up my mind to be silent until then. My heart was sore at first to think of the life you were

leading. Then I considered that it is God's will we should do our duty in that position in which He has seen fit to place us. To you had been given over the actual possession of many fellow-creatures. I left you free to discharge your responsibilities, in the hope, Stella, that thus might be conjured from the head of the youngest and best of us any further share in the fatality which has pursued our families. If you deem otherwise, there is plenty of time left you to be a sharer in the pomps and vanity of the world."

Mr. Gautier's voice during this speech had varied with the different feelings dictating it. The last words were said in so chill and dry a manner that Stella had not courage for a word.

"Now, I have done my sermon; there is yet a ceremony to go through between us. I hope to place all the accounts since your father's death before you within a week or so; when you have signed a release to me, you will be your own mistress."

A little impatient sigh reached Mr. Gautier's ear.

"Of one thing, I must warn you," he continued; "though you have been among those who have suffered least from the late insurrection, your loss is still considerable. The crop then on the bushes was half lost: prices have fallen; in short, my dear cousin, your income is reduced one half and your outgoings remain the same, if they are not increased. Every year you are likely to be poorer and poorer. And now this brings me to the most painful part of what I have to say."

"Oh! pray, don't!" whispered Stella.

Louis was proof against the agitated face that he had to look at. "It is necessary you should now decide on some future plan for yourself."

"Why?" was all Stella could say.

"Because now that you are of age, my mother will leave Cedar Valley with me. As long as

both yourself and your estates were in my guardianship, it was under the circumstances the best, perhaps the only arrangement to be made, that of our all continuing to reside together. When we sign the accounts, Stella, we shall cry quits."

"Cousin Louis—cousin Louis!"

"I mean, that you will be able to set your aunt and your stepmother's mind at rest as to our having taken all the advantage of you they suppose. You must, Stella, be able to repel with knowledge as well as with generosity any attacks against my integrity. The indemnity I shall receive for the losses at Silver Hill will make good any claims for the support of my negroes, for I am aware they have been fed from Cedar Valley. As for the rest——"

"Then you are really going away?" she interrupted. Stella had not heard a word of his last speech.

"Really and truly. Why, Stella, you would

not wish to deprive me of a home of my own."

No use for Louis to speak thus to Stella. She was too terrified at the idea of the separation to be susceptible. She put out her hand, and seized Mr. Gautier's. "Cousin Louis, don't go away—don't, I cannot bear it; it will not do. I can't——"

"My poor Stella! my poor darling!"

He had no more resistance in him now; he forgot he was poor—or a cripple; he opened his arms, she laid her head on his breast, sighing deeply. One of her arms stole up round his neck: his lips pressed her eyes, her hair, her hands. Strange, sweet murmurs were sounding in her ear.

"I did not think you would have the heart to leave me all alone, cousin Louis."

"Oh! Stella, I am selfish."

"Then be magnanimous, cousin Louis! Go away from me, break my heart—it is yours; you

can do as you like with it. There, you are free!" and she sat upright.

"Do you really love me so much, Stella?" and he drew her close to him again.

"How can I tell you how much? I don't know—I never shall know—I cannot count so much."

"And how much do you think I love you?"

"Never mind telling me."

"Did you never guess how much?"

"Oh! cousin Louis, how could I? Once—yes, just once—I did think you did, a very—very little. But then there have been wretched times since. I thought I hated you; but still I never had any will but to do what you wished. Cousin Louis, you *do* care for me—promise that no one will ever make you give me up."

"Give you up! care for you! what words to use to a man who, believing he had a long, painful journey before him, suddenly finds himself within the Eden he had done his best to close

against himself! I have dreamed of such a day as this, Stella: dreamed of it long ago." He gathered her into his arms, as a mother might have done her little child. "Oh! my darling, I hold you now; you are mine, and I am yours." He kissed her repeatedly—once more kissed her, on mouth, eyes, and brow. With one of her quick, childlike movements, she drew his head down, and pressed her lips to his hair. "Ah! foolish one, kissing grey hair."

Stella's answer was stopped by a sound that jarred the nerves of the lovers. A woman's husky voice was singing, or rather muttering, close to them it seemed, but in reality on the other side of the hedge—

" Earie, earie, de malinga,
Ma fanina ma qua,
Earie, Earie de malinga,
To to me, Earie, to to me Earie."

Wild, weird music it was.

"It is Rebecca," whispered Stella. "I have heard her moaning those words under my window

when you were so ill. She always ran away the moment I called to her."

"Must there be a cloud on this day?" said Louis; "I never see or hear of that girl without a spasm of remorse. I refused to follow the inspiration of my guardian angel; I refused help to one in need. Stella, I want the contact of your pure heart to renew my life."

"Cousin Louis, take my hand."

"Say Louis alone."

"Louis, take my hand in yours, and promise me sacredly, that nothing but death shall us part."

"I promise that nothing but death shall us part."

"Nothing but death shall us part," repeated Stella. "Oh! Louis, to think that anything can divide us."

She hid her eyes against his shoulder, as if to shut out some dreaded sight.

He answered her gravely, and sadly—"Shall I warn you of what would separate us more

than the grave? Should I ever feel, that you had a shade of regret; for I should find it out, though you hid it deep in your heart—never even acknowledged it to yourself.”

“I am not afraid,” she answered, simply.

A little negro boy, dressed in a white shirt, suddenly stood before Stella; the child shifted uneasily from foot to foot, his eyes rolling fearfully, betokening a crisis of perplexity.

Even Mr. Gautier, in this moment of high-strung rapture, could not restrain a slight laugh.

“Well, Calalue,” * said Stella, “what do you want? This is one of my best scholars,” presenting the boy to Louis.

“Please, young missus, Auntie Manie say you no got to stay here; Becka she down in hothouse, wait for young missus.”

“Tell Manie I am coming directly, hearie?”

“Who gave the child that ridiculous name?” asked Louis.

* Calalue—*anglice*, spinach.

"My gorfaders and gormoders," began Calalue.

"Go, go; massa has not time to hear you now," said Stella. "We must go also, Louis," offering her arm, "for Rebecca never stays long."

As he rose, the remembrance of his bodily infirmity flushed his face.

"Tell me, Louis, did you really *mean* to go and leave me?"

"Very really."

"And if I had not begged you to stay, you would have gone—oh, Louis!"

"Do not give me credit for too much heroism. Happiness has lighted down on my heart. I feel the warmth of her soft plumage. I will put her in a cage and keep her, God willing!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

WHEN Stella reached the sick-house, Rebecca had already disappeared. The visits made by the poor crazy girl to her former home were very rare—only twice since the night of the 22nd of December had Stella seen her. Through the help of Dr. McNiel and the Rev. Mr. Eff, it had been made known to all the properties of the district, that any assistance or kindness to Rebecca would be gratefully acknowledged by Miss Joddrell. Besides this, care had been taken to furnish Rebecca with a “free pass,” to prevent any zealous upholder of the slave laws from sending her to the workhouse as a runaway. In short, every precaution compassion

could dictate had been taken to secure to the afflicted girl her liberty, the only good left to her.

The housekeeper told Stella that she had persuaded Rebecca to put on some new clothes—that she had filled her basket with provisions, and had then left her sitting on the mounting-stone, waiting, as it seemed, patiently enough to see the young mistress. Stella was sorry to have missed her protégée; however, it was but a very little misfortune on such a day of wonderful happiness, and Stella hastened back to the house, longing to meet again the open glance of confiding love she had received for the first time.

What an evening that was! The mother, with her son and his affianced bride, sat in the porch watching the decline of day; Stella's hand lay in that of Louis. There was little conversation among them; they were all under the spell of languor, like combatants reposing after a battle.

They sat on after the sun had sunk—after the luminous haze he had left behind had died away into a clear gray opal twilight.

Louis asked in a low voice, "Where are your thoughts, Stella—my Stella, my own peculiar star?"

Eyes like stars turned on the questioner. "I was thinking," quoth his bride to be, "of that evening at Evian when grandmamma and I almost quarrelled about the world."

"You were such an experienced woman," he smilingly said, "that I should like to hear what your opinion was."

"The same as now, Louis: that the world is a beautiful place, and that one can find many friends there."

"And grandmamma thought the contrary, I suppose?"

"Ah, poor grandmamma! she was very heart-sick. I understand her better now: but then I had no idea of such feelings as hers."

"Tell me about your life with her—was she unkind to you?"

"No; rather harsh sometimes. I led a very solitary life. I envied any child that had brothers and sisters, and so I made myself air-brothers and sisters to talk and play with—and I was always wishing for bed-time, that I might go to them."

"Poor little girl! and so you think the world as beautiful as you had pictured it to yourself?"

There was just light enough for Stella to see the movement on Louis's face, like that left on the waters of a lake when a storm subsides. The occasional quiver of the muscles round the mouth imparted that expression of emotion which holds such sway over women's feelings.

To Louis's half-jealous question, she answered with frank joyousness, laying her free hand over his,—

"Oh! yes, cousin Louis."

The stars began to come out, first one, then two,

until at last the sky was one wonder of brilliant lights.

The lovers sat on, enjoying in the still beauty of the scene the deep tenderness of their hearts. Every sparkle in the cloudless heaven, every leaf that stood out dark in contrast, every cry of birds seeking their nest, discoursed to Louis and Stella of hope and joy to come, and the very intensity of their happiness made them ready to shed tears, but tears of the sweetest melancholy.

"Come in, my children," said the Maman, waking them from their ecstasy; "the dew is beginning to fall."

When seen by the light of the candles, it struck Stella that Louis was unusually pale, even for him. Was it her fancy or not? She had a sudden pang of fear, and an involuntary thought that life seemed concentrated in his eyes—the rest of his face looked like a waxen mask.

"You are tired?" she said to him.

"I don't know that I am," he replied, as he

lay down on his sofa—"but rest, with you by my side, your hand in mine, is very delightful."

"Shall I read to you one of your newspapers?" asked Stella—as if she were now afraid of silence.

"No; I want to enjoy the luxury of pleasant thoughts—it is so long since I had any. No; I don't care for the external world to-night, my darling."

Words of tenderness from those grave, stern lips made Stella's heart beat quite wildly; she had dreamed of being allowed to love him—of his accepting her devotion—but never, never that he could call her "his darling" in such a tone, and look at her with eyes of such fond devotion. He must not—she was such a silly girl—so inferior to him—she should die of happiness if this continued.

There had been no unburying Aunt Portia all day. "I feel them coming, my dear," she had whispered to Stella, through the window of her sedan. "The blues—you know—and I don't

want to be troublesome this day of all the days of the year, for I saw you in the garden—just had a peep of you—and then I felt my horrors coming. I'll try and be quiet, Miss Stella." And so Miss Portia was; save when, at dinner time, the servants went near her refuge; then there was a sound of hissing, like that of a goose disturbed on its nest: but according to Aunt Portia's desire no notice was taken.

Tenderly, very tenderly—Stella had had no conception of the tenderness of a strong-hearted man—Louis blessed her when they separated at night. She had also received the Maman's maternal embrace; but a longing for more sympathy sent Stella to Mrs. Gautier's room. A Bible was open on the dressing-table, and Stella's eyes, as she bent over the Maman, read the words, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

"Maman! and when we are so happy," exclaimed Stella, reproachfully. "Maman, you

must not wish to leave us—we cannot do without you to make us good children. Read somewhere else, Maman ; it makes me unhappy—it frightens me to look at that prayer.”

The little scene with Mrs. Gautier had agitated Stella—and kept her long awake ; when she did sleep, she was disturbed by dreams ; once she awoke under the belief that there was a knocking at her door, and some one calling to her for help. She listened, but all was quiet ; scarcely, however, had she laid her head on her pillow again, than she heard a light footstep in her room. Her first impulse was to hide her head beneath the bed-clothes and remain silent, but the step was approaching the bed. “Who is there ?” she asked, in as steady a tone as she could muster.

“Missus, me good young missus, don’t curse him as did it—curse me, missus ; me de debbil dat egg him on.”

“Rebecca ! is that you ? Come here close to

me, my good Rebecca," said Stella, holding her hand out in the direction of the voice.

Rebecca came close to the young lady's side.

"No cry, young missus—try be happy in Engerland; be fine young lady dere—hold up your head wid de best. No stay here, all bad, white man, black man, not a pin to choose 'tween 'em—you go in big ship and get English husband, and I die, and not care how much I punished."

Rebecca was possessed by one idea; she was repeating to Stella what she had said when they had met at Cedar Valley after Mr. Joddrell's death.

"Lie down on the mat Rebecca, and try to sleep," said Stella, soothingly. She could hear that the black girl obeyed. Presently Rebecca began talking again. "De step-moder she put her own children under one blue stripe blanket, de oder wife's single gal she put under red border one, and she say to de debbil, go kill dat you

find under red blanket, den dere come little bird out of de grave—and sing, sing so sweet. Hi! you no hearie him, young missus! him say, quite plain, you got to go to Eingerland.”

“Perhaps I *shall* go soon,” said Stella, hoping to quiet the excited Rebecca.

“Bery well—dat good gal—me satisfy now,” and Stella heard her open the window and jalousies and creep through. It was the same window she had crept through the night that Louis had found the obi.

Stella was now too flurried for sleep. She lay anxiously expecting the dawn, waiting for the sound of the servants stirring about the house. At last, there were whisperings and footsteps, and as if relieved of some unacknowledged apprehension, she was dropping into slumber, when her door opened, and housekeeper Manie’s tall figure appeared.

“Young missus, keep brave heart, my pore chile; dey be nobody else, ’xcept you to ’pend on.”

"Rebecca is dead," exclaimed Stella, jumping up. "Tell me quick, good Manie."

"Hi—my chile, worsen nor dat. Massa Louis hab bad night; he 'sturbed by some ting, he get up and he fall, and hurt hisself bad—very bad. No—Miss Stella, you no 'ab to give way: you must be brave gal now, hearie?" Manie was holding her young mistress firmly in her strong arms.

"I thought it was too much happiness for us, Manie," were her first words, laying her head on the black woman's shoulder; "he will die and leave me. Oh! Manie, my good Manie, what shall I do."

"While de breath of life in a man, dere's hope, Miss Stella. See now, I bring paper, ink, and pen, and you write to dem biggest doctors in Kingston, we send man on horseback, and he back in no time; write to Massa Tom, he come too, that's my good chile."

Stella asked no more questions. She did not dare.

She wrote under Manie's guidance. Manie filling the pen each time it required ink, for Stella was too lifeless even to have energy to do that.

"De ole lady, she know noting at all ; get up and dress, till I send man away, hearie, my chile?"

When the disastrous news was broken to Mrs. Gautier, she turned one look on Stella, only one look—O Heaven! how is it that hearts do not break at once?

Sooner than could have been expected, the Kingston physician, Dr. Whitehead, arrived, and Tom appeared an hour afterwards with one of the surgeons of his regiment.

The unabating misfortunes of the Gautiers and the Joddrells were making them the objects of general interest. They began to be looked on almost with awe: for misfortune, when it reaches a certain height, wraps round its victim a robe of dignity.

Mr. Hubbard and the surgeon had received

leave of absence to remain at Cedar Valley for the present, and even the great M.D. of Kingston resolved to stay twenty-four hours with the patient.

When that period had expired, Dr. Whitehead said to Stella: "I am glad to say that immediate danger is past; but this illness will end by leaving Mr. Gautier paralysed: the nerves of touch are effected; it will be gradual, a little more and a little more each day, but paralysis of those nerves is inevitable. The evil really dates from the night of the insurrection, the 22nd of last December."

"Then he is not going to die," exclaimed the girl, in so wild a tone of joy that the two medical men were startled.

"I should say certainly there is no danger to life," observed the young surgeon, compassionately, and looking significantly at the grey-haired M.D.

"Thank you, sir, thank you very much,"

cried Stella, pressing her hands tightly together.

"But it is worse than death," said the grave physician.

"No, no; you must not say that, sir; death separates, but mere illness does not."

The two medical men walked away from one another, hemmed and coughed. Stella pursued the physician.

"Sir, I have something to say to you. I am engaged to my cousin, I love him better—oh, sir! I can't be separated from him—I *won't* be separated from him," looking in Dr. Whitehead's steady eyes. "Nothing shall make me leave him. Promise me, upon your word of honour, that you will not tell him that he will never be cured."

"I cannot give such a promise, Miss Joddrell. Setting aside other motives, I should be wrong to deceive Mr. Gautier if he asked me seriously the question of cure or no cure."

“You are not infallible,” replied Stella, passionately. “We will take him to England—all over Europe; many are cured whom doctors have condemned. For God’s sake don’t separate me from him; and he will insist on it, if you tell him he will not be cured; I will nurse him so well—I will pray—oh, don’t be so cruel.”

“Let them read Liebermann’s book of missions,” cried Miss Portia, putting forth her head from the sedan, a surprise that forced the medical gentlemen into most undignified saltatory motions. “There they’ll see what can be done, and without the help of doctors. A man—I forget his name—prayed, folded his arms, and twenty-four hours after everything went right—success in everything, I tell you.”

“Miss Joddrell is right,” interposed the surgeon, the first to recover from his astonishment. “We are not infallible; change of air, and scene, and a course of German baths, may do wonders.”

“Yes, may they not?” broke in Stella, with

such a pleading face, that Dr. Whitehead took refuge in her own saying—

“Very true: we are none of us infallible.”

“Then you will not tell him that he cannot be cured.”

“I will recommend the baths of *Aqui* and *Aix* in *Savoy*,” was Dr. Whitehead’s answer; “they *have* performed cures.”

Poor *Stella*! and yet not poor *Stella*! for who can be called poor, that can bestow such wealth of consolation as she did?

To look in Mr. *Gautier*’s eyes when he heard her step, was to be convinced that she was his life. The *Maman* would say, “I feel when she comes into the room as if she were an angel—his pains moderate.”

One day *Louis* said to *Stella*—

“Give me your hand, darling: I am afraid this illness of mine is going to be a very long one.”

“We must make ready to go to *England*, *Louis*,

and get as fast as we can to those baths Dr. Whitehead says are so miraculous. How droll there should be the same story of their virtue being discovered by pigs as is told of the Bath waters in England."

Her voice was admirable in its indifferent tones, but her heart was throbbing painfully, for while she spoke Mr. Gautier was feeling her hand curiously—now fixing his eyes on it—now turning away.

"I could declare," he said, "that my fingers were numbed."

"And, Louis," went on Stella, her face growing crimson, then deadly pale, "I think it would be better if we could—if we should ——"

"What do you wish me to do, Stella. I will do anything you please or desire—alas! I am so helpless."

She put both her arms round his neck and whispered to him. Tears, hot tears, fell from his eyes on her neck.

“Don’t cry, Louis, I cannot bear it; you will kill me.” He was trying to unclasp her arms, that he might see her face, but he had not strength even to do that. “You promised me—you promised me,” she kept on repeating.

“Am I then so helplessly ill, Stella?” he asked.

“I have written to Auntie, and told her that—that we were to be married directly; if we wait till we are in England, oh! Louis, think of the Hubbards, and Mrs. Joddrell, and Auntie—they will take me away from you, and *could* you do without me, Louis?”

“I am afraid not very well, nor for very long,” he said, with a heavy sigh.

The next time Dr. Whitehead paid his visit to Cedar Valley, he was closeted for some time with Mr. Gautier. Stella was waiting in an agony of suspense.

“Well!” she said, seizing the M.D.’s arm, as he left the invalid.

Dr. Whitehead's somewhat hard face was now full of repressed emotion.

"God forgive me, Miss Joddrell, for withholding my opinion from that excellent man. Young lady, never slacken in your tender care of him or you will have an extra sin on your conscience, that of having forced an honest man to play with what he believed to be the truth."

Mr. Gautier cross-examined the surgeon, no fear there; the young man had adopted Stella's view of the case, and in perfect good faith, predicted the success of German or Swiss baths. He brought up a long list of similar cases ending in entire cures.

It was a very solemn marriage, that of Louis and Stella; they were married by special licence at Cedar Valley. It would have been unsafe to let Louis risk trying to ride to the church, and to be carried thither on such an occasion Stella guessed would hurt his feelings.

The Maman, Aunt Portia, Tom Hubbard, and Mr. Boggis were alone present. Stella had asked Louis to let the faithful overseer give her away: it was a mark of gratitude and trust he deserved for many services rendered during the last two trying years. To his care were left the estates and Miss Portia Lowe.

CONCLUSION.

“ There is a comfort in the strength of love.
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would break the heart.”

WORDSWORTH.

PERHAPS some English travellers in search of health or change may remember to have met, years ago, on their route or at bathing establishments in Germany and Italy, a party of four persons. A beautiful, pale young woman, her face more remarkable for its expression than even its regular features. An expression, at once decided and full of goodness, loyal and frank—softening with a golden smile of love when her look met that of her husband. He was a helpless cripple, but had a magnificent head, and his eyes were wonderfully beautiful. Every foreigner attached a romantic story to the English invalid

and those with him; the few with whom he conversed were charmed by a manner only to be described as playful sadness.

A quiet, small, old lady, with hair white as snow, and a tall, strong, elderly negress, were the inseparable companions of the husband and wife. Wherever they went these people excited an extraordinary interest. They were not rich, yet they always obtained good rooms and attendance at hotels and baths. As Stella passed on her way, kind voices called to her, "Hope on, dear lady."

THE END.

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